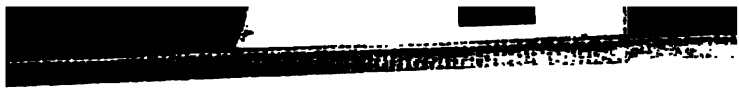

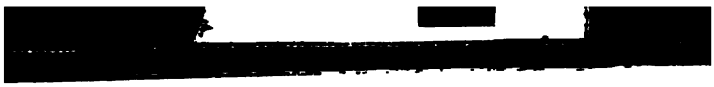

THE SECOND BULLET

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BY

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Chapter I.

THE LADY AND THE ENIGMA.

"WHO is she, anyway?" Beatrice Ledyard placed her coffee cup upon the tabouret and raised her hazel eyes with a curious feline glint in them to her mother.

"My dear Trixy, what a question!" Mrs. Ledyard waved a plump hand deprecatingly. "I've been talking of Mrs. Hartshorne, and the invaluable aid she has given us in preparation for the Red Cross bazaar—"

"I know, but is she going to take charge of a booth herself? Is she going to appear in any capacity?" Trixy pursued. "Doesn't it strike you as a bit odd that in all the six months she has been here in Eastopolis Mrs. Hartshorne has never appeared at any more public function than church?"

"You don't mean that she might possibly be afraid of meeting embarrassing acquaintances from the past, do you Trixy?" a guileless voice asked sweetly from a low chair by the fern-banked hearth, and Bébé Cowles helped herself lazily to another lump of sugar. "It would be simply fascinating to find that we had an adventuress in our prosaic exclusive midst."

"I mean that she has managed in this short space of time to get in with all of us and yet we know no more about her

than if she had dropped from the clouds. Who and what was Mr. Hartshorne? When did he die, if he is dead, as she claims? Did Mr. Hartshorne ever really exist?"

"Aren't you a trifle hard on her, Trixy? Of course she's made a slave of every unattached man in our set, but we're bound to get some of them back on the rebound! At any rate, it seems a bit late in the day to begin asking awkward questions." Bébé shook her golden head. "Your mother would never have taken her up, I am sure, had there been anything—well, baffling about her. Of course, we all followed dear Mrs. Ledyard's lead."

If Mrs. Ledyard divined a hint of amused malice in the childlike tones she rose majestically above it.

"I am not in the habit of committing social errors," she asseverated. "Anyone qualified to discriminate could see at once that Mrs. Hartshorne's breeding is unassailable and I think it is scarcely in good taste, Trixy, for you to utter vague insinuations against such a charming woman. If she avoids thrusting herself forward in public affairs it is due to her modest, retiring disposition; an attitude all too rarely encountered in these days. As for me, I don't know what I should have done without her on the National Defense Committee, to say nothing of the French Orphans and the Armenian Relief—"

"I'm insinuating nothing, mother; I am merely curious." Trixy was the only person living who dared to interrupt her mother. That dominant lady writhed. "I grant you that she has not attempted to establish an actual intimacy with any of us; rather, she has held us at arm's length. But may not that be as much against her as in her favor? As to her social position among us, of course, she has made herself indispensable to you in your war work and to Dr. Perrine in parish matters; but the ladder of charity has

been used by every climber since our social system was organized. Aside from the fact that she has been absolutely silent about her antecedents, has she mentioned a single person of whom we have ever heard outside Eastopolis?"

"My dear, you are allowing your sudden prejudice to carry you to absurd lengths," her mother responded coldly. "I trust you will not permit your manner to betray it when she drops in later for bridge. Mr. Swarthmore is bringing her on from the Gaylors' dinner, you know."

"Neely Swarthmore doesn't appear to share your suspisions, Trixy," Bébé remarked slyly.

Trixy darted a scornful glance at her bosom friend, but she responded quietly enough.

"They are not suspicions, merely conjectures. There, the dining-room doors are opening!"

"I was wondering if your father would ever let them escape!" Mrs. Ledyard began, but the voices of the three men who completed the sextette of the little dinner party traveled before them as they crossed the music room, and made her pause.

"Marvelous! Most extraordinary business acumen for a woman!" The sleek, pompous tones of Wendle Braddock, President of the Eastopolis Trust Company, came unctuously to their ears. "She banks with us, you know, and I've attempted more than once to advise her in her financial deals, but events have proved the wisdom of her own decision."

"I know it!" Colonel Ledyard laughed genially. "Had the same experience myself with her, as she trades through me. She's invariably on the right side of the market."

"It is precisely this remarkable executive ability which makes her work in the parish invaluable," chimed in Dr. Perrine's rounded pulpit tones. "Extremely generous, too

—ah, ladies! I fear we have kept you waiting, but the Colonel's reminiscences were so diverting—"

"Of whom were you speaking just now?" Trixy asked, moving significantly to make room for him on the davenport beside her.

"Of our dear friend Mrs. Hartshorne." The minister accepted her gestured invitation. "She has been of inestimable value in the parish."

"So I understand." Trixy raised her eyebrows and after a moment added: "What church did she attend before coming here, Dr. Perrine?"

"Let me see." He balanced the tips of his fingers together reflectively. "Was it St. Thomas's in New York, or St. Christopher's in—? Dear me, my memory is really so bad!"

"But surely she told you?" The sentence was more a statement than a question, yet it contained an inflection which increased the Reverend Dr. Perrine's discomfiture.

"Well really, I—she must have mentioned it, of course, but I confess it has slipped my mind. She has taken her place so modestly, yet so willingly, in affairs of the Church, that it quite seems as though she had always been a member of the congregation. Don't you agree with me, my dear Mrs. Ledyard?"

"I do, indeed!" that lady responded with emphasis. "She will be here at any moment. You don't object to bridge I know, Doctor, in a worthy cause?"

"Mr. Braddock,"—Trixy's velvety tones had sharpened —"we all know that Mrs. Hartshorne has deposited her surplus capital with your Trust Company. Would it be an indiscretion for me to ask you how those deposits were made? I mean, did she give checks on any similar institution in another city, anything by which the source of that

capital could be traced if the necessity ever arose for such a proceeding?"

President Braddock's pendulous cheeks had reddened between his white side-whiskers.

"My dear, I cannot imagine such a contingency. As I recall, Mrs. Hartshorne's deposits were made in cash and negotiable securities, but it is really a most extraordinary question!"

"What on earth put such an idea into your head, Trixy?" demanded Colonel Ledyard. "Mrs. Hartshorne is a thoroughly estimable—"

"Father!" she interrupted him imperiously. "You yourself say that she is a sharper on the market, that she played it as if she had tips from the very brains directing each coup. What brokers did she deal with before coming to you, and where did she learn the game? On the Bourse or the London 'Change or in Walll Street? What do you actually know about her previous transactions?"

"Trixy!" her mother exclaimed in a scandalized voice, while the Colonel eyed his daughter in amazement.

"Bless my soul, I never asked her! When a young woman comes to you with a brain like a steel trap, orders which make you sit up and take notice, and bona fide securities to carry them out, you don't ask her for references like a—a housemaid, you know."

"Exactly!" Trixy sat back with a satisfied air. "That is just the point I wished to bring out. Remember, I have nothing aginst Mrs. Hartshorne. But I know nothing about her; nor do any of you. Without social or financial reference on her part, without on your part the slightest knowledge of who or what she really is, you have all taken her on trust merely because she has a Madonna face, an ingratiating manner and—ready cash! Dr. Perrine is

usually most particular about the antecedents of his flock—"

"Most assuredly, my dear Miss Ledyard!" The minister raised his hands in shocked expostulation. "But there can be no question about Mrs. Hartshorne!"

"Has there been, when she came here a stranger and has studiously remained one!" Trixy turned to the older men. "A minister or a social arbiter like mother may judge from mere appearance, but I ask you frankly if it is usual for financiers to accept a client without business references, solely on the face value of money and securities negotiable anywhere—which might have changed hands a hundred times and in as many ways?"

"Certainly not!" Mr. Braddock retorted; for the Colonel seemed beyond speech. "I myself received Mrs. Hartshorne and—studied her, if I may say so. I am rather a keen judge of human nature, my dear young lady, and I am fully convinced that she is unassailable from any point of view."

"So are all the men!" Bébé Cowles' childish treble broke in. "Dear chivalrous things, and *so* infallible! What are references, anyway, except a tactful means of foisting upon gullible strangers an incompetent or dishonest person we wish to rid ourselves of? I'm referring, of course, as the Colonel did, to the hypothetical housemaid. I for one am perfectly content to be guided by the quick unerring judgment of a keen man of the world."

She smiled up into Wendle Braddock's fatuous eyes. He was on the point of a gratified rejoinder when the butler threw open the wide doors leading into the hallway.

"Mrs. Hartshorne! Mr. Swarthmore!" he announced, and stepped aside.

Mrs. Ledyard rose with a sigh of relief to greet her guests, who entered together; a tall, dark-haired man of forty, whose well-bred, clean-cut countenance bore the un-

mistakable lines of one who had traveled many roads, and beside him a delicately-molded, gracious figure, whose serene, confiding face bore the look of one to whom all roads meant a safe and welcoming haven.

Mrs. Hartshorne was young, obviously in her early indefinite thirties. Her face was of quite a usual type, fair and softly oval, with tender sensitive lips, blue-gray eyes and brown hair simply banded about a small head. Nothing gave it distinct individuality save perhaps the small v-shaped scar beneath the left temple; and yet beneath its gentle appeal there seemed to lie latent an expression of sphinx-like inscrutability.

Mrs. Ledyard's greeting was more markedly effusive than usual. There followed a brief, awkward pause which, by a common impulse, everyone rushed to eliminate; everyone except Mrs. Hartshorne. She stood quietly at her ease, listening, nodding, smiling and looking about her from one face to another with a calm, steady gaze. If some intuition warned her that she had been the subject of discussion she made no sign. If, in the glances of at least two of the three men who had been her champions, she divined for the first time a shade of doubt, of questioning, she made no effort to disarm it. She turned coolly to her hostess and at once drew her into a conversation upon her pet charity.

Cornelius Swarthmore strolled casually over to the two girls.

"You're coming to mother's Red Cross dance Thursday evening, Neely?" There was command as well as entreaty in Trixy's tones, but he ignored them with a trace of impatience.

"You know how I loathe that sort of an affair, Trix. Jammed to the doors with every outsider who can scare up the price of a ticket to say they have been entertained here!

I'll try to wedge my way through the crush for awhile, but it's bound to be a bore."

"Not with that wonderful new jazz band Mrs. Ledyard has engaged!" Bébé cried enthusiastically. "Vallory's, you know. She had a frightful time getting him, for he is booked literally months ahead. He's the drummer and practically the whole show; plays a dozen bing-bang instruments at once!"

"This jazz thing is being worked to death." As if aware of his rudeness, Swarthmore added hastily: "I hear that this Vallory is a wonder, though. I'm sure the affair will be a great success for the cause."

"Whatever is the matter with you lately, Neely? Touch of liver or just plain grouch?" Bébé eyed him critically with her golden head atilt. Trixy had turned away. "You used to be as keen as the proletariat on any sort of an affair gotten up by Mrs. Ledyard."

"I'm cutting it all out," he responded evasively. "Government contracts won't wait while a man plays the society game, my dear Bébé."

"O patriotism!" she scoffed lightly. "What delinquencies are perpetrated in thy name!"

"Isn't it splendid?" Mrs. Ledyard bore down upon them. "Mrs. Hartshorne has promised to come to the dance, after all."

"How nice!" Bébé exclaimed sweetly. "But I thought Mrs. Hartshorne quite shunned all semi-public functions. Now of course we may count on you, Neely?"

"Trixy, my child, did you tell Hickson to set up the bridge table?" Mrs. Ledyard turned to her daughter, then to the group of men who surrounded Mrs. Hartshorne. "Dr. Perrine, you won't frown on our playing a cent a point if half the winnings goes to the Canteen—?"

"Shocking!" Dr. Perrine was obviously deaf to his hostess for the moment. "Used the money of small investors, you say? Robbed the poor?"

Wendle Braddock nodded, smacking his lips unctuously. "Converted it. He was President of the Riverboro bank. Speculated and lost, Zenas Prall said in his confession. Anyway, he went to Atlanta four years ago on a twenty-year term. They've let him out just recently on a plea of ill-health."

"Poor devil!" the Colonel commented. "Pretty tough to go straight for fifty years of life and then come a cropper, isn't it?"

"It is very sad!" Mrs. Hartshorne's lips dropped pathetically. "I don't remember hearing of the case; it must have come up before the war, when I was abroad. It is tragic for the poor man, of course, but then think of the small investors, the pitifully hoarded savings of the poor!"

"You have lived abroad, then?" Trixy had passed her mother swiftly; and although she spoke with assumed carelessness there was a note of inquisition in her tones.

"Yes. I have connections there." It seemed for an infinitesimal second that Mrs. Hartshorne faltered, but she offered no further revelation.

"That is curious!" Trixy smiled, although her tawny eyes narrowed. "Somehow, I fancied you were from the West."

"I have relatives scattered throughout that part of the country, whom I visited occasionally as a girl. Perhaps I have acquired some of their idioms. That may account for your impression, Miss Ledyard." Then catching sight of Hickson in the doorway bearing the bridge table Mrs. Hartshorne turned to her hostess with a little apologetic cry. "Oh, I'm so sorry, but I hope you will forgive me if I don't play tonight. I've such a wretched headache! I

really only stopped in for a moment to drop Mr. Swarthmore and to ask you to excuse me, but I've been so interested that I forgot to mention it."

"Then stay and perhaps your headache will leave you," the Colonel suggested gallantly.

Mrs. Hartshorne shook her head.

"I only have them once in a blue moon, but when they come I have to give in absolutely to them. Every hour that I fight off one of these attacks means an added hour of suffering. I'm so very sorry—" she held out her hand to Mrs. Ledyard, "but then I do want to feel really fit on Thursday night for your dance."

"Perhaps you will permit me to drive you to your house?" President Braddock suggested, coming forward. "I don't play bridge, you know, and I am going your way. I should be delighted—"

"Excuse me, old man, but I'm taking Mrs. Hartshorne home," interrupted Swarthmore firmly. "I could only have played one rubber, anyway, for there's a chap from Washington getting in at midnight whom I have to meet at the train. Mrs. Hartshorne, I accompanied you from the Gaylors; and that surely establishes a prior claim!"

He added the last sentence laughingly but with a significance which brooked no refusal. Mrs. Hartshorne made a little *moue* of consent.

"I feel like a culprit, breaking up your game, Mrs. Ledyard," she sighed. "But really——"

"My dear, it's of no consequence," her hostess responded graciously. "I am only grieved that you are suffering. I would forego any mere card game to have you with us Thursday. However, as Mr. Swarthmore invariably loses, I think it is only fair that he should send me a nice check for my Canteen Fund."

With mock chagrin Swarthmore promised and they took their leave. In the limousine his manner softened. He turned to his companion with a quick note of concern.

"Why didn't you mention your headache to me? Was it really your intention to rid yourself of me at the Ledyards'? You'll find I'm not to be dropped so easily!"

Mrs. Hartshorne made no reply. She was leaning back against the cushions and her face was in shadow. As he bent toward her, he felt her form tremble convulsively.

"Are you really suffering so much?" he exclaimed, with unmistakable tenderness. "Do you know, I fancied it was a ruse of yours to get away from——"

He paused and Mrs. Hartshorne suddenly covered her face with her shaking hands.

"Oh, don't please!" The cry seemed wrung from her. "Why should I have run away from the Ledyards? I am unnerved, unstrung! My head—oh, why did you not let me go alone?"

"I'm sorry." He drew back stiffly. "It was purely selfish on my part; I wanted to be with you. I thought Miss Ledyard might possibly have annoyed you."

Her hands dropped and she laughed hysterically.

"Miss Ledyard?" she repeated with a scornful bitterness which came strangely from her gentle lips. "What do a hundred Miss Ledyards matter? Let her be the first to give tongue—"

She caught herself up abruptly, then added quietly:

"Do forgive me. I scarcely know what I am saying; this pain is maddening! Of course I—I am glad that you are taking me home."

She laid her hand upon his arm and Swarthmore seized it, quick to pursue his advantage.

"Is it too late for me to come in just for a moment?

I will not be a selfish brute and keep you from your rest, but you are such an illusive person, and there is something I want to tell you—"

Mrs. Hartshorne gently withdrew her hand.

"Not now, I—I could not listen. I am really ill."

"Then to-morrow?" he urged. "Surely you will be better? I do not mean to be importunate, but I have waited so long! I may come to-morrow?"

Mrs. Hartshorne bowed her head and a little smile, hidden in shadow, played about her lips.

"To-morrow."

Back in the Ledyards' drawing-room Trixy, too, was smiling, but in triumph.

"You heard, all of you! That headache didn't manifest itself until I began questioning her."

"Trixy, I am astounded!" her mother exclaimed. "You were abominably rude. Not so much in what you said—but your manner! I'm afraid you have offended Mrs. Hartshorne deeply."

"What if I have?" the younger woman retorted cooly. "Her friendship or enmity is nothing to me."

"Dear me! This is all very distressing!" murmured Dr. Perrine.

"Distressing? It is preposterous!" President Braddock blustered. "Mrs. Hartshorne is absolutely above criticism."

"So are all of us!" Bébé laughed. "But it reaches us, sooner or later. It is a scandalous world, isn't it, Colonel Ledyard?"

The Colonel had been silent, but on his usually genial brow a slight frown had gathered.

"I don't know," he responded reflectively. "The woodpile looks innocent enough, but what if there were a little negro in it, somewhere, after all?"

Chapter II.

WOMAN DISPOSES.

IT was nearly noon when Miss Rose Adare mounted the steps of Mrs. Hartshorne's small but perfectly appointed house and rang the bell.

She was a slender, vivacious young person, of the black-haired, blue-eyed, fair-skinned type which betokens Hibernian ancestry of the higher order. The tilt of her small, tantalizing nose and the curve of her scarlet, delicately molded lips suggested a sense of humor balanced by the square little chin and cool level gaze.

She frowned as she waited, tapping her foot impatiently. At length a trim housemaid opened the door.

"Oh, it's you, Miss Adare. Mrs. Hartshorne hasn't been feeling very well. Matilde is with her now, and she is better. You can go straight up."

With a nod, Miss Adare availed herself of the permission. Running up the stairs, she knocked lightly upon her client's door.

Matilde, a thin, sallow Frenchwoman, admitted her and gestured unsmilingly toward the bed. The girl approached and a little exclamation of shocked surprise broke from her lips.

"Oh, Mrs. Hartshorne! What is the matter? Jenny told me you had been unwell, but were better. I didn't dream you were as ill as this!"

With an effort Mrs. Hartshorne drew herself up among

her pillows. Her face was drawn and haggard, her eyes deeply sunken. In each wan cheek a brilliant red spot burned.

"Good morning, Rose. Do I look such a fright? It is just one of my old neuralgic headaches. The handglass, please, Matilde."

The maid brought it without a word. Her mistress after one glance dropped it upon the bed beside her with a horrified gasp.

"Heavens! I don't wonder!"

"Perhaps you won't need me today—?" Rose ventured.

"Oh, but I do! I wanted to look particularly nice, and I must manage to pull myself together, somehow. I have heaps of correspondence to be answered." Mrs. Hartshorne turned to her maid. "You may go, Matilde."

When the door had closed, she leaned forward eagerly.

"Rose, you are such a marvellously clever little social secretary—I wonder if you can help me with a bit of personal advice. I am a nervous wreck and I know it! Too many late hours and social activities; I never could endure them. I look ghastly, hideous, and yet this afternoon I must be fresh and blooming. Can you tell me how to work a miracle?"

"If you'll forgive me for the suggestion, I would try a little rouge, Mrs. Hartshorne," Rose responded frankly. "You never would before, but no massage in the world will bring the right color now, or the blood to your lips."

"Very well." Mrs. Hartshorne sank back with a sigh. "I suppose I must . . . Now let us get on with the notes. They are mostly invitations—to be declined, as usual. You will know how to do it gracefully, without dictation."

The girl smiled and turned to the small stand beside the bed.

"You can trust me for that. Now, I'll just move these magazines to make room for my stationery and things—good gracious!"

As she swept the papers from the table an ugly blunt-nosed revolver of the "bull-dog" type stared wickedly up at her startled eyes.

Mrs. Hartshorne reached out in haste and picking up the small weapon thrust it carelessly beneath her pillow.

"Did it frighten you?" she laughed. "It isn't loaded. I'm so reckless about leaving jewels and money about the house that I keep it to scare away possible burglars. Do let us get the correspondence over with."

The laugh had not sounded quite natural to the girl's alert ears, but the excuse seemed plausible enough and she commenced her rapid sorting of the mail without further remark.

During the light scratching of the pen on paper, Mrs. Hartshorne lay spent and inert; but when the first batch of notes was completed she asked suddenly:

"Rose, has anyone been asking you questions about me? Any of your other clients, I mean; the women in my own set? I'm rather curious!"

Rose paused, an unopened envelope in her hands.

"About you, Mrs. Hartshorne? How could they? The most any woman asks me about another is whether she evades her tradesmen's bills or receives many love letters. And anybody could see with half an eye——"

"I don't mean that. I came here a stranger, you know, and people are usually so inquisitive." Her eyes carefully avoided those of the girl.

"Well, I'll tell you," Rose replied. "When I began this work as visiting social secretary I made up my mind that nobody would get any information from me about any

clients. Not that there's usually anything worth while repeating, but you know how little things can be twisted and turned and made to look like something entirely different. Attending to social correspondence is my business, not tattling."

A discreet knock at the door punctuated her peroration and Matilde entered with a huge, ornate florist's box from the end of which protruded long spiky stems. She handed her mistress a note.

Mrs. Hartshorne tore it open and read:

Dear Lady:

I trust that your indisposition has passed and you are your own happy, charming self again. May these few roses brighen and hasten your convalescence! I wonder if you will do me the honor of dining with me tonight at the Grosvenor? My messenger will await your reply.

Yours faithfully,

WENDLE BRADDOCK.

She gave an amused glance at the box which Matilde had opened; the ponderous, florid roses were not unlike their giver. Then she pursed her lips thoughtfully.

The Grosvenor was the most exclusive restaurant in the city, and Wendle Braddock had not been known to dine in public tête-à-tête with a woman since he had attained years and prominence. What could this invitation portend?

"Take them out, Matilde,"—she pointed to the opulent roses—"and put them—no, ask Jenny to cut the stems short and place them in a low glass bowl in the dining-room. Now, Rose, lend me your pen, please! I must write this note myself."

Matilde complied and her mistress wrote a few lines rapidly and sealed them.

"Please give this to the messenger. That is all."

She seemed disinclined for further conversation. Rose completed the last of the morning's correspondence in silence. Then she handed Mrs. Hartshorne the little pile of notes.

"These are all, I think. Please tell me if they are all right?"

But Mrs. Hartshorne waved them away.

"You can always be depended upon to write the proper thing, my dear. Now I shall dress and try a little rouge, as you advise. Perhaps then no one will guess that all last night——" she broke off, shuddering, with an inadvertent glance toward the window.

The girl's eyes folowed hers. But all she could see was the sedate rear wall of the neighbor's house, across a narrow strip of gardens, fresh in the tender green of early spring.

At that moment Matilde entered again, and once more she bore a florist's box; but this one was slim and dazzlingly white. When she opened it a loose mass of fragrant, delicate spring blossoms fell out upon the bed as if freshly culled from some old-fashioned garden.

The card which accompanied them was Cornelius Swarthmore's. The message it bore was a simple one.

> I send these because they are like you. Until this afternoon.

"Madame will have these—?" The tactiurn maid spoke for the first time, and although her tone was respectful enough it was curiously level and repressed.

"In the drawing-room, Matilde." A smile of complacency, almost of derision crossed the pale lips of Mrs.

Hartshorne, and she added as the maid departed: "That is all for to-day, Rose. Pray that I shall look well this afternoon!"

It was indeed a radiant young woman who entered the drawing-room at twilight and held out her hand to Swarthmore. The deftly darkened lashes lent an added brilliancy to her eyes and her serene, delicately flushed face bore no traces of the drawn haggardness of the morning.

"You look wonderfully well!" Cornelius Swarthmore exclaimed as he straightened after pressing his lips to her hand. "But then you always do, to me. By Jove, I believe that headache of yours was a ruse, after all!"

"No really!" Mrs. Hartshorne protested as she motioned him to a chair and seated herself on the couch with her back to the rose-shaded lamp. "It has quite gone now, however. Thank you for your lovely flowers, but I'm afraid they're not a bit like me, although I love them. They belong in some quaint old garden where their ancestors have been rooted for generations, and I—I belong in far corners of the earth."

"What do you mean?" he asked in quick concern.

She shrugged.

"I am a born nomad, I fear; a wanderer. I try to settle down, to fasten myself to a place by bonds of friendship and financial responsibility, and then the call of the wanderlust comes and I must answer."

"That is foolish!" he smiled indulgently. "You are dissatisfied because you are so much alone."

"I detest huge public affairs. I am only going to the Red Cross dance tomorrow night because Mrs. Ledyard has been so kind and I do not wish to disappoint her."

"I don't mean that," Swarthmore countered swiftly. "But

you are not the type of woman to lead a solitary existence. You need a warm, human interest, protection, love——"

Mrs. Hartshorne shook her head, smiling a trifle sadly.

"But suppose I tried that and it failed to hold me? Suppose the desire for new scenes came upon me again? No, it is woman as well as man, who travels fastest when she travels alone. I am restless even now; my nerves are on edge. I think I shall go away very soon."

"A woman alone; a woman like you!" Swarthmore rose and seated himself beside her. "Do you think, if you married a man with red blood in his veins, a man who loved you, that he could not hold you? Ah, my dear, why will you talk of going away? You know what I came here to tell you this afternoon, you must have known it for weeks! It seemed to me that you were purposely holding me off."

"You mustn't, please!" Mrs. Hartshorne put both hands out protestingly. But he seized them and drew her close.

"I must! You are so quiet and gentle and mouselike—and yet there is something about you that drives a man mad! Shall I make a confession? At first I considered you merely a sweet, pleasingly attractive little woman; then, I don't know why, my eyes began to follow you—and my thoughts! I looked for you everywhere and felt disappointed and savage if you were not there. And when you were, it was like a draught of champagne! I began seeking you out, confiding in you, telling you my secret plans as I have told them to no one else on earth!"

Mrs. Hartshorne made an ineffectual effort to free herself.

"You mean the government contracts? The padded bids and the undergrade stuff? But there was no harm in that, nothing exactly illegal. You told me so yourself; you said that everybody was doing it and you might as well get your

share of the profits. Why should you not have told me? I was proud of your confidence!"

A dull flush had mounted to Swarthmore's brow and his voice grew swiftly hoarse.

"I don't want to talk about that now; I'm trying to show you what you mean to me. There've been other women, of course. Women who amused me for an hour and others whom I thought would look well at the head of my household, but none who combined every attribute in themselves as you do! You drew me to you, held me as I am holding your hands now."

"You are hurting me!" she murmured plaintively. "And Jenny is coming with the tea!"

He released her; and rising, walked to the window where he stood for a moment staring out into the fast-gathering darkness.

"What an enigma you are!" he remarked at length. "I wonder sometimes if you know your power and use it with consummate art, or whether you are utterly unconscious of the effect you have upon men. We are all your slaves—even that doddering, smug-faced old rascal Braddock."

"Don't call him that!" she remonstrated sweetly. "I like him, he's so nice and fatherly. And besides, he's dining here to-night."

"Is he?" Swarthmore turned upon her, his eyes smoldering.

"Yes. He asked me to dine at the Grosvenor with him, but I did not feel quite up to going out, so I invited him here instead."

"Why?" he demanded savagely. "You are not the empty-headed sort to want scalps to dangle at your belt!"

"He is coming to talk over my business affairs with me." Her eyes opened wide. "He advises me, you know."

"He's put a few spokes in my wheels, senile as he is, but I've always managed to knock them out in time." Swarthmore muttered. "Don't you know that he is using your affairs as a mere excuse? That he's infatuated with you? Call him up and tell him you are too ill to see him, and then come and dine with me somewhere! I won't leave you until I've made you listen to me, until I've convinced you that your happiness lies in my hands!"

The entrance of Jenny with the tea brought the conversation to a less emotional pitch and for a time they chatted of mere social affairs, but when they were alone together once more Swarthmore moved determinedly to her side.

"Why should we talk about these other people? What do they matter? The only thing that counts in all the world is that I love you! I want to make you my wife!"

"How like a man!" she smiled. "You are very confident, Mr. Swarthmore! Are you quite sure that you could hold me? What if the old gypsy longing came back and I wanted to go——"

"I would take you," he interrupted, "anywhere in the world! Out of the way places where you could never venture without a protector! You are searching for happiness; I'll give it to you."

Mrs. Hartshorne sighed.

"How can you know me, when I don't know myself?" she asked softly. "I might let you persuade me—you are very masterful and compelling, you know—I might feel quite sure that you could really do all that you protest and make me happy. And then my mood might change and I would feel tempted to run away from it all—a formal engagement, and everybody's congratulations and silly dinners—even from you!"

"Will you marry me now, to-night?" he cried eagerly. "I'm not afraid of your moods once you belong to me. We'll cut out all the formal business and just run away as you wanted to, only we will go together. Will you, dear?"

But Mrs. Hartshorne had not even heard. She was staring past him at the black expanse of the window where he had left the curtain drawn back. Her eyes were dark with terror and her face ghastly, so that the rouge stood out in blotches on her cheeks.

As Swarthmore uttered a startled exclamation she gasped, and one hand flew to her breast, where her gown sagged oddly as if borne down by some unaccustomed weight.

"What is it?" Swarthmore leaped to his feet. "What is the matter? You are ill!"

"A face!" she whispered hoarsely. "A face at the window!"

He turned and flung the sash high. Nothing was to be seen but the quiet deserted street slumbering in the warm fragrant dusk.

"What sort of a face was it?" he asked closing the window and returning to her side. "There isn't a soul out there."

"I don't know. A horrible, malign face like that of a beast! A thief, perhaps! Oh, I am afraid, afraid!"

"But why should you be?" he bent low above her. "Burglaries are infrequent in this part of town; it is too well lighted and policed. Poor little woman, who wants to trot off to the ends of the earth and yet is afraid in her own home!"

"But I—I have several thousand dollars in cash in the house. I always do, it is an idiosyncrasy of mine. Some one may have known of it, I tell you!" Her voice was

rising with a sharp note of hysteria. "Oh, I have reason to be afraid!"

Somehow she found herself all at once in Swarthmore's arms, laughing and crying and clinging to him convulsively. He held her close, murmuring soothingly until her hysteria had subsided. Then he lifted her head and pressed his lips to hers.

"You *shall* marry me, sweetheart! We will go away quietly if that is what you wish. No one need know. You are nervous, unstrung! You need someone to take care of you and shield you even from the things you imagine! Tell me that you will!"

Her fingers tightened like slim bands of steel upon his arms and a shudder swept over her. Then she forced herself resolutely to calmness.

"I will marry you, Neely."

"When? To-night?" he cried joyously.

"No, not to-night, but soon, within a few days." A little natural color had flooded her cheeks and her eyes glittered. "Only you must promise to keep it absolutely a secret until —until it is over. You know how I shrink from publicity; I could never endure the congratulations and all the fuss and bother!"

"You won't have to, dear!" Swarthmore paused and then added, with an embarrassed laugh. "Do you know, I'm going to marry the loveliest little woman in all the world; —and I don't even know her name?"

"My name?" she exclaimed. "Why, 'Allie', of course!"

"'Allie'?" Swarthmore repeated. "For 'Allison'? I thought that was——"

"My husband's name," she supplemented as he hesitated. "So it was, but mine is 'Alice'."

"And how it suits you!" he cried rapturously. "Alice!

You said you would marry me in a few days, but when? You have warned me—your mood may change, you know! I'm not going to let you get away from me, I warn you, in turn. The motto of the Swarthmore family centuries ago in England was: *'What I want, I take. What I have none shall take from me!* I have you now and I don't mean to lose you, Alice! What day will you marry me, dear?"

She glanced up at him and then lowered her eyes swiftly. It might have been in modesty or to hide a certain gleam which had crept unbidden into them.

"I will tell you to-morrow night," she murmured. "At the Red Cross dance."

Chapter III.

WHAT THE DAWN BROUGHT.

THE Ledyard dance was an overwhelming success. Everyone admitted it, from Hickson who had stood at the door with an expression of scandalized martyrdom and collected the purchased tickets of admission, to the Red Cross treasurer who ultimately received the hostess' check. The exclusive coterie which made up the smart set of Eastopolis mingled for once in amused tolerance with the opulent but unelect which packed the Ledyard residence to the doors. Vallory's jazz band fairly surpassed itself in blare and din and eccentric antics, the floral decorations were superb and the supper worthy of a Savarin. But for that which followed so closely upon it, the function would have been the most talked-of event of the year.

Bébé Cowles, who had been an overnight guest of the Ledyards', rose somewhat languidly shortly before noon on the following day and gathering the draperies of her negligee about her, made her way to Trixy's room. Repeated tapping brought no response and at length she unceremoniously opened the door and entered.

The heavy curtains were still drawn to shut out the brilliant spring sunshine, but in the semi-obscurity she discerned the white expanse of the bed with Trixy lying inertly among her pillows.

"I've been knocking for ever so long! Didn't you hear me?" Bébé asked in an injured tone. Then, perceiving

an untouched breakfast tray on the stand she added: "What is the matter? Don't you feel well, dear?"

The girl in the bed neither spoke nor moved save that her eyes turned slowly to her visitor, but there was no sign of recognition in them.

"Trixy! What is it! Speak to me!" Bébé almost shrieked. "Trixy, for heaven's sake——!"

A shudder swept the recumbent figure.

"Oh, it's you, Bébé!" she said faintly. "I—I must have been dozing."

"Did you have a bad night?" asked the other, perching herself at the bed's foot and cuddling down into the silken coverlet. Without waiting for a reply she went on: "It wouldn't surprise me if you had, after all the champagne you drank at supper! You so seldom touch it, and yet last night I saw you take glass after glass. It didn't affect you in the least, I'll say that for you, dear, but I was sure you'd have a frightful head this morning."

"Yes, that must be it, of course; the champagne!" Trixy spoke almost eagerly. "Rather disgraceful, isn't it? And yet do you know I wasn't conscious of what I was drinking; I felt parched with thirst and it was iced and pleasant. But where are the papers? Do ring for them Bébé."

"I've been yawning over them in my room." Bébé uncurled herself reluctantly. "They've given the affair a write-up like the opening of the opera season."

"There is nothing—nothing else?" Trixy's face was averted as she spoke.

"Nothing but the after-the-war political stuff. What should there be?"

"Then never mind; I don't want to see them," she hesitated. "I fancied there might have been a flurry in stocks. Father has seemed worried lately."

"The market is steady enough. You'd better believe I looked at it first of all! If the bottom falls out of it, away goes little Bébé's alimony," observed that young person coolly. Then her volatile thoughts reverting to the previous evening, she exclaimed: "Wasn't the jazz band wonderful?"

"It was atrocious!" Trixy shuddered. "It seems as though I should never get the sound of it out of my ears!"

"It was a bit noisy. But that leader, Vallory himself! He seemed to play twenty things at once besides the big drum, and each of them made a different slam-bang racket. His hands simply flew!"

"I didn't notice him particularly."

"Well, I did, because in the midst of his craziest antics that melancholy expression of his never changed. It's a pose, of course, but it made me think somehow of Pagliacci. However, Trixy, if you don't mind my saying so, I think your mother used poor judgment in stationing the band so near the conservatory. People can't carry on a satisfactory flirtation in pantomime, and you couldn't hear yourself think in there!"

"But you know what a crush it was; mother wanted to leave as much space as possible for the dancing." Trixy spoke with an obvious effort. "What was that?"

"What?"

"I thought I heard a noise out in the street." Trixy sank back again into her pillows.

"Your nerves, darling," Bébé assured her comfortably. "But what do you suppose happened to the conservatory door last night? Freddie Gaylor and I tried to get in there after supper, but the door wouldn't budge. Did it stick or did your father lock his precious orchids away from the common herd?"

"Oh, it stuck, I fancy," responded the other carelessly. "The key has been lost for ages."

"Mrs. Hartshorne looked stunning, didn't she?" Bébé chattered on. "When she decided at last to emerge from her shell, she burst forth in a blaze of glory. I'll say that much for her. Did you ever see such a ravishing string of pearls? It's funny she never exhibited them before."

She paused as if for encouragement but none being vouchsafed her, she asked suddenly:

"Where was she at supper, by the way? I don't remember seeing her then or afterwards. When did she go?"

"Why do you ask me?" The cry seemed wrung from Trixy at last by her tortured nerves. "Why do you keep harping on her? I've endured all I can, Bébé! Don't dare speak of her to me again!"

"Good heavens, Trixy, you look savage enough to kill her——"

"A-ah!" Trixy covered her lips as if to stifle the sound which issued from them.

"Oh, well, if you feel that way, I suppose I had best go back to my own room!" Bébé shrugged. "I'm going to tell you one thing, though, for your own good; you're showing your hand too plainly. If we hadn't played around together since we were babies I wouldn't speak, but I hate to see you making a fool of yourself! Goodness knows we've no secrets from each other. I told you when I first fell in love with Hamilton and you were my maid of honor at the wedding. And you knew all about how happy I was then and how wretched he made me later! Don't you suppose I realize how you feel about Neely Swarthmore? The point is, there's no reason why the whole world should know that he jilted you for——"

"Bébé, will you go away, please?" Trixy sat up with

sudden strength, her tawny eyes flashing. "Will you leave me to myself for a while? I told you I could not endure any more!"

"Of course I'll go!" Bébé sprang up, offended. "Only others beside myself may have observed you last night when you two met face to face in the hall."

"What do you mean?" the other demanded.

"I was sitting out a dance on the stairs with Freddie when Neely fairly rushed from the ballroom, with a perfectly fiendish expression on his face, and started like a mad bull to jam his way through the crush to the cloakroom. It must have been about half-past eleven, for we had two dances more before supper, I remember. Neely came face to face with you and shouldered his way past without a word. You laid your hand on his arm, but he shook it off as though he didn't recognize you—wasn't even conscious of your existence. You turned and stood looking after him, and one glimpse of your face just then would have given away the whole situation to anyone who wasn't quite blind!" Bébé paused, and then added: "You used to be so proud that I hate to see you humble yourself before any man, least of all Neely—after the way he has treated you! You'll have your chance for revenge, of course, but you haven't spunk enough to take it, because you care too much. He'll come crawling back to you soon, never fear!"

"How do you know?" Trixy's tone was steady and oddly repressed. "What makes you say that, Bébé? Why should he come back now?"

"Never mind what I know!" Bébé stuck out her little chin obstinately. "Everybody thinks I'm a chatterbox, but I know enough to keep out of mischief by holding my tongue once in a while! He'll come back, but oh! Trixy, don't

take him on again! I married a handsome rotter and I know what I went through! I couldn't bear to see you suffer that and worse than that when the truth is out."

"What truth!" Trixy was white to the lips. "I don't know what you are keeping from me, but this I do know; if Neely Swarthmore ever dared to—to make love to me again, if he ever dared even to approach me, I think I should die of disgust and horror and loathing! I don't want 'revenge', as you call it; I only want to forget that he ever lived! You are right. I have been a blind fool, but my eyes are opened now. Care for him? From the depths of my soul I abhor him!"

Weeping hysterically, she flung herself back upon her pillows and Bébé, her own resentment forgotten, had all she could do to comfort her.

At that moment Rose Adare was mounting the steps of Mrs. Hartshorne's pretty little house. She rang, and this time there was no delay; her hand was scarcely off the bell when the door flew open and Matilde, the usually taciturn Frenchwoman, stood before her.

The maid's sallow face was even more pale than was its wont, but her eyes glittered with suppressed excitement and her bosom rose and fell rapidly with her panting breath.

"I have been waiting for you, Mademoiselle Adare! You are late!" She drew the wondering girl within and closed the door softly.

"I had another appointment and I thought it wouldn't matter; that Mrs. Hartshorne would probably sleep late after the dance. That is why I didn't telephone; I was afraid of disturbing her."

"Come up now, if you please." Matilde turned and led the way to the staircase and Rose followed, puzzled by the woman's manner no less than by a vague feeling of op-

pression which swiftly assailed her. Where was Jenny, and why did the usual silence of that well-ordered household seem increased a hundredfold, deepening into something strange and sinister and forbidding?

They paused before Mrs. Hartshorne's door. Rose raised her hand to knock when the Frenchwoman stopped her.

"It will do no good. Look through the keyhole, Mademoiselle."

Rose drew back, her round eyes fairly starting from her head.

"What do you mean, Matilde?" she whispered. "Something—something dreadful has happened to Mrs. Hartshorne?"

"I fear that she is very ill," the woman responded slowly as if choosing each word with care. "She must have fainted when she returned from the dance. The door is locked, and I cannot make her hear me. Look, Mademoiselle!"

Without more ado Rose stooped and peered through the keyhole. The next instant she recoiled and her handbag fell to the floor.

Through the orifice she had beheld the head and shoulders of Mrs. Hartshorne, who appeared to be lying face upward upon the floor. The hair was arranged as it must have been on the previous evening and the marblelike neck, encircled by a string of huge pearls, arose from the shimmering satin of a marvelous dance frock.

"She—she isn't—!" The word would not come.

"Madame has had fainting spells before which lasted for hours." Matilde shrugged.

"But we must get help immediately! Why didn't you do so at once when you saw her lying there?" After the first shock the girl's alert brain had reacted and she gazed sharply at the Frenchwoman.

"It was only a moment before you came that I myself looked through the keyhole, Mademoiselle, and I thought that you would know best what to do. Jenny and the cook, they are impossible, they know nothing, and I preferred that you should be here." Matilde hesitated, then added in cool significance. "You see, Mademoiselle, it may not be a fainting spell, after all!"

With a coldness at her heart, Rose seized the handle of the door and shook it violently, but with no result. Then backing off a few steps she hurled her lithe young strength against it. The door did not even quiver. The next instant Rose was flying down the stairs.

She tore open the front door and stood for a moment on the steps gazing up and down the quiet street. A physician's landaulet stood before the house across the way. Motor cars were coming and going, and a delivery boy went whistling past; but there was no sign of that which she sought.

With an inarticulate mutter of exasperation Rose sped down the steps and toward the nearest corner, heedless of the curious glances cast after her. She had neared the intersection of the avenue when a blue-coated figure hove in sight, sauntering along in apparent aimlessness. He quickened his pace when he perceived the approaching girl.

"Officer!" Rose exclaimed breathlessly. "You know Mrs. Hartshorne's house, number one thirty nine?"

"Certainly, Miss." His tone was tersely interrogatory.

"Come quickly, please. There's trouble there!"

The front door was open as she had left it. Speechlessly she pointed up the stair. The Frenchwoman still cowered in the hall before her mistress' room, but Rose gestured eloquently to the keyhole, and the policeman looked through it.

One glance was sufficient. The officer backed away and then lunged forward, his huge shoulder meeting the door with a crashing impact. It strained at the first onslaught, bent under the force of the second and the third burst its lock and flung it back, sagging drunkenly on its hinges.

The policeman entered with Rose close at his heels and Matilde behind her.

Mrs. Hartshorne lay motionless as if asleep, save that her lids were not quite closed and beneath the hand which rested quietly on her breast a sinister dark stain appeared. The finger-tips of the other hand outstretched beside her, touched the handle of a small, blunt-nosed revolver.

"A-ah! Madame has killed herself!" came from the Frenchwoman's lips. There was an incongruous note, almost of exultation in the cry. Rose whirled upon her, her own eyes blurred with tears.

"Then who locked the door and took away the key?" she demanded. "Oh, is she really dead, officer?"

"Been dead for hours," he responded as he rose from his knees beside the recumbent form. The girl noted that he had removed his cap. "Where's your telephone?"

Matilde indicated the extension beside the bed and as he moved briskly toward it, Rose exclaimed softly:

"Poor Mrs. Hartshorne! I can't believe that she did it herself! Matilde, how can you be so unfeeling? Mrs. Hartshorne thought you were devoted to her, and yet now you seem almost glad!"

"I would have followed Madame to the ends of the earth!" The woman responded with suddenly aroused fervour. "I would have guarded her from all harm with my own life if that had been necessary. But if she has killed herself, what would you?"

Rose had no time to ponder this enigmatic speech, for

the policeman turned from the 'phone with an exclamation of impatience.

"Can't get any action here," he grumbled. "It must be switched off downstairs. Go and turn it."

As Matilde, without a second glance at the still form of her mistress, left the room to obey, he approached Rose.

"You don't belong here, Miss, though I've seen you come and go often. What are you doing here?"

Rose explained and added her version of the morning's tragic discovery in a shaking voice, her tearful eyes returning as though fascinated to the still countenance of the dead woman.

"I can't think why she should have done it!" she concluded with a sob. "Mrs. Gaylor, the client I've just come from, said Mrs. Hartshorne looked simply wonderful at the dance last night and 'radiantly happy'. Those were her very words! Why should the poor thing have come home and shot herself?"

"The telephone extension is connected now." the calm voice of Matilde announced from the doorway. As the policeman turned once more to the instrument beside the bed Rose raised her eyes from the dead woman to the living. The suppressed excitement with which Matilde had greeted her on her arrival, the apprehension and dread she had evinced before the closed door, had dropped from her like a cloak when the actual fact of her mistress' death was established. Why was relief rather than grief suggested by her attitude? If she would have been willing, as she asserted, to give her life for Mrs. Hartshorne's preservation?

Her obvious lie recurred also to increase the perplexity in the girl's mind. When she greeted her at the door, perhaps in an unguarded instant of relief at her coming,

Matilde had betrayed the fact that she had been waiting for her; yet a few minutes later, when asked why, she had not summoned aid, the Frenchwoman asseverated that she had herself made the discovery only a moment before Rose came. She must have known for some time, perhaps hours, what awaited them upstairs. Why had she delayed sounding the alarm until Rose's arrival would have made discovery certain, or an evasion have later inevitably directed suspicion against herself?

"Chief Burke is coming up with a couple of men from Headquarters," the policeman announced, hanging up the receiver. "The Coroner'll be here, too, in a little while. Now, Miss,"—he addressed himself pointedly to Rose—"I'm sorry, but I'll have to ask you to wait. Will you go down to the parlor, please? I want to ask the maid, here, a few questions."

Rose obeyed, pausing only to pick up her hand-bag which lay in the hall. The drawing-room was dim and cool, and fragrant with the cloying perfume of some huge crimson roses which hung limply from a low glass bowl on the piano. The girl shuddered involuntarily. These were the roses which had arrived two days before, when she had found Mrs. Hartshorne ill, and had first seen that vicious little weapon which now lay within touch of those nerveless, rigid fingers above.

Presently she heard Matilde coming downstairs; but without pausing the Frenchwoman descended to the basement, from whence shrill outcries announced that she had broken the news to the other servants. Rose wondered why the policeman did not appear, until she heard a chair scrape the hardwood floor of the hall overhead. She concluded that he had taken up his post outside the room of death.

The minutes seemed very long as she sat there alone, but

at length Matilde and Jenny, followed by the cook and the little kitchen maid, filed into the room, evidently under orders. The Frenchwoman walked to the window, where she stood looking out with hard tearless eyes; but the others seated themselves awkwardly in the nearest chairs. Jenny wept softly, but the cook gave herself up to voluble lamentations, while Sadie, the kitchen maid, sat with dropped jaw and protruding, lack-luster eyes, dumb with terror.

The raucous cry of strawberry venders and the laughter of children on their way home from school came shrilly to Rose's ears from the street outside. At last the grinding of brakes before the door and a sharp peal of the bell told her that their vigil was at an end.

Jenny admitted the officials and they trooped upstairs. Shortly afterward came the Coroner.

Even the cook was hushed to silence, as they listened with strained ears to the subdued murmur of voices from above. No words were distinguishable until, after a prolonged debate, heavy footsteps approached the stairs and a sentence, evidently flung back over the man's shoulder, reached the women huddled below.

"If that's the case, Doctor, then Paul Harvey is the lad to handle it for us."

The steps descended and a stout, grayhaired man with bristling mustache appeared in the doorway.

"Where is the 'phone down here? Come and show me the switch, one of you. I don't want to talk from the extension."

Matilde did not even turn, but Jenny complied, and the stern voice, softened now and almost fatherly, came once more to their ears:

"Hello? Chief Burke talking. I want to speak to Paul . . . Hello, Paul, feel well enough to take on another

case right away? . . . Good boy! . . . Number one thirty-nine West Farragut Street . . . Big thing, all right, the biggest in years. Looked like a plain suicide at first, but it's a clear case of murder . . . In ten minutes? Goodbye."

Rose scarcely heard when the Chief of Police hung up the receiver and started once more up the stairs, for at the word "murder" Matilde swayed, caught vainly at the curtains to save herself, and fell in a crumpled unconscious heap upon the floor.

Chapter IV.

QUESTIONS.

IT was within the allotted ten minutes that a modest green runabout drew up at the curb behind the Coroner's sedan and the Chief's impressive twelve-cylinder, before the little house whose dicreetly curtained windows veiled a tragedy.

The humming of the motor ceased abruptly and a young man sprang from behind the wheel and darted up the steps, through the crowd of excited, curious bystanders which had already gathered about the door.

He was a tall, slender young man with a splendid breadth of shoulder and strong, clean-cut features. One looked twice before noting the slight halting limp and the shadows of ever-present suffering about the deep brown eyes.

"That's the boy! Come up here, Paul!" the Chief called from the head of the stairs, when Jenny had opened the door. "I've got something to show you."

Paul bounded lightly up the stairs albeit an involuntary grimace of pain twisted his lips. The Chief threw an arm across his shoulder in fatherly fashion and drew him into the bedroom beyond.

"Doctor Cravenshaw, this is Paul Harvey, son of Alfred Harvey, the former Commissioner, and one of the best! Paul is attached to the Force in a semi-official capacity as a special investigator and he's given us a lot of help; rounded up the Reuhl counterfeiting gang and got Van Vrenken, the

diamond thief. We haven't put him on a murder case before; there wasn't one big enough for him. That's why you haven't run into him until now."

"I'm very glad to know you, sir." The Coroner shook hands cordially. "I've heard of your father, of course. Unless I'm mistaken, you will find this case big enough to tax all your powers."

He stepped aside, revealing the body, and Paul, who had flushed deeply at the Chief's praise, advanced and dropped on one knee beside the rigid form, his keen eyes taking in every detail.

"Mrs. Hartshorne herself," he commented. "I thought it must be when you 'phoned, Chief; you wouldn't have come rushing up in person if it had been just one of the servants. She has been dead for some hours, hasn't she, Doctor?"

"Eight or ten, perhaps longer," the Coroner responded. "I'd like to call your attention to the posture of the body, Mr. Harvey. Looks like suicide, right enough, doesn't it, at first glance? And yet——"

"There aren't any powder marks on the clothing about the wound." Paul interrupted him. "That's one item for a starter. The shot must have been fired from several feet away, at least. And who arranged her gown so nicely about her feet and tried to close her eyes?"

"Hah! You got that, did you?" The Coroner smiled.

"I told you he would!" exulted Chief Burke.

"Oh, well, the eyes of a corpse are usually staring wide, and when they are mere slits like these, it's a safe bet that somebody tried to close them," explained Paul half-apologetically. Then he bent still lower over the body.

The two older men watched him in silence, forbearing to interrupt his examination by any advice of their own.

At length he sat back on his heels and looked up at them.

"I can't make it out," he admitted frankly. "This is surely a unique murderer you have steered me up against, Chief. He kills the woman, puts the revolver in her hand to try to save himself from suspicion, and then an almost womanish sentimental pity takes possession of him. Knowing that he's likely to be discovered at any moment, he stays long enough to close her eyes, arrange her skirt about her ankles and even places one of her hands across her breast, covering the wound."

Chief Burke looked a trifle disconcerted and the Coroner laughed.

"The Chief thought that, in falling, her elbow might have struck the edge of that chair there beside her, and her arm been flung across her breast, but I tried to show him how unlikely that theory was. In such a case, reflex action would have made the hand slip limply off the breast to the floor. No, the upper arm was resting on the floor when the forearm was raised and pressed across the body," Dr. Cravenshaw explained. "I'm glad that point did not escape you."

"You have examined the revolver, sir?" Paul turned to the Chief.

"Yes, one shot has been fired from it," the latter responded. "She must have been killed immediately after her return from the Red Cross ball at the Ledyards'."

"So that is where she had been," Paul nodded. "I've seen her name in the papers a lot, of course, in connection with society and war work and that sort of thing. She had time to take her cloak off and lay it over that chair—by the way, have you examined it?"

"The cloak? Yes. No evidence there."

Nevertheless Paul picked up the luxurious fur-trimmed garment and looked at both sides of it closely before re-

placing it with a slight shrug as of acquiescence. He turned again to the Coroner and remarked:

"There doesn't seem to be very much blood, Doctor."

"No, but the revolver is of small caliber and the lady may have been anaemic," Dr. Cravenshaw replied. "All that, of course, will be determined at the autopsy. I thought myself that the effusion was very slight; it has probably soaked up into the rug."

"What time did Mrs. Hartshorne return? That ought to give you approximately the hour in which she met her death." Paul resumed to his superior. "Was she alone? Who let her in? Why didn't the sound of the revolver shot alarm the house?"

"Don't know, my boy. I've let you in on the ground floor; called you up the minute Dr. Cravenshaw had come to the conclusion that it was a case of murder. I waited for you to come before questioning the servants but Officer King, here, who broke down the door, got a statement from the maid and the other young woman."

"Hello, John!" Paul grinned in friendly fashion at the policeman who appeared in the doorway at mention of his name. "How did you come to get into this?"

"It's my regular beat now, Mr. Harvey." Officer King returned the grin as he saluted. "I was coming along down the block when the young girl that does fancy letter-writing came running out to me and told me there was trouble here. Her story was straight enough, but I couldn't get much out of that Frenchwoman, Mrs. Hartshorne's maid."

He told of the finding of the body and, when he had concluded, the Coroner prepared to depart.

"I'll have the body removed in an hour," the latter observed. "Let me see, to-day is Friday and I have the autopsy to perform; I'll call the inquest for Monday."

"All right, Doctor. I'll have all your witnesses on hand," the Chief assured him. "It may have been an inside job at that, but there's no telling yet. I'll call at your office later."

The Coroner nodded and withdrew and Paul strode to a window and looked out.

"No chance of anyone climbing up here; there isn't a vine or even a crevice to give him toe-hold."

"And the windows were all fastened on the inside," supplemented Chief Burke. "The murderer, whoever he was, locked the door and carried the key away with him. That's how the maid, Matilde, found out something was wrong; she looked through the keyhole."

"Let's go and have a talk with her now?" suggested Paul. "I'll go over the room thoroughly later, but I'd like to hear what the servants have to say for themselves, and the social secretary, too."

Leaving Officer King still on duty they descended and found the servants grouped about Matilde, who lay upon the couch. Rose Adare was standing a little apart.

"What's the matter here?" the Chief demanded, bruskly.

"Matilde fainted." It was Rose who replied.

"I am better now; it is nothing." Matilde sat up weakly. "You wished to see me, Monsieur?"

"This young man, here, would like to ask you a few questions. What is that small room across the hall?"

"The reception room, Monsieur."

"We'll go in there. The rest of you wait here." The Chief turned to Rose. "Sorry to detain you, too, but it is necessary."

"I understand." Rose was gazing at the slightly lame young man with sympathetic interest. "I don't mind waiting."

The Chief led the way to the reception room and seating himself precariously in a fragile gilt chair, motioned Matilde to one on the other side of the table. Paul closed the door and began pacing the floor pausing only to shoot question after question at the Frenchwoman.

"What is your name?"

"Matilde Benoit, Monsieur."

"Where did you come from?"

"From Peronne in the north of France, Monsieur. The war has perhaps destroyed all records——"

There was a note of mockery in the observation and Paul interrupted her peremptorily.

"How long since you came to this country?"

"Nine years, Monsieur. My last position was in New York with an old lady who died."

"How long have you been with Mrs. Hartshorne?"

"Seven months, Monsieur; one month before we came here to Eastopolis."

Her tone was demurely respectful now, but it was plain that she meant to give her interrogator no information that was not specifically required. Paul, realizing this, changed his tactics.

"Tell me where you met Mrs. Hartshorne, and how you came to enter her employ."

"In New York." Matilde hesitated. "When the old lady died I was worn out from caring for her; I had to go to the hospital and when I came out I could get no work. At last I found a position in the linen room of a big hotel and there I met Mrs. Hartshorne. She took a fancy to me and engaged me for her maid."

"What hotel was this?"

"The Belmonde, Monsieur."

"Very good; we'll let that go for awhile." Paul halted

beside her so that in turning to him she was compelled to face the light. "Who accompanied Mrs. Hartshorne to the dance last night?"

"She dined first at the house of Madame Gaylor. I think she went on with them to the dance."

"At what time did she return?"

"I do not know, Monsieur. Madame instructed me not to wait up for her."

"Did one of the other maids open the door for her?"

"Oh, no, Monsieur! Madame took her own key."

"And you heard nothing during the night?"

"Nothing whatever. We were all asleep." Matilde paused, and added in sudden volubility. "If it is the revolver shot that you mean, Monsieur, it is not strange; the motor speedway runs through the next street and we are accustomed to the sound of bursting tires."

It was the first observation she had volunteered, and there was a shade too much eagerness in her tone.

"Tell me exactly what happened this morning. Did you notice anything unusual when you first came down stairs?"

"But, no, Monsieur! It is Madame's custom to sleep always with her door locked. I descended and breakfasted with the other maids and then mended some of Madame's laces. I have orders not to disturb her until she rings, but that is ordinarily about ten, unless Madame is ill." Matilde's volubility had slackened and she spoke now almost haltingly. "She has not been well, lately, and I became anxious when the hour of eleven came and no sound from Madame's room. I went to her door and knocked softly, but there was no reply. It occurred to me then that perhaps Madame had not returned; that she had stayed at the house of Madame Gaylor. It has not happened before, but Mademe has for some days been not quite herself——"

The woman paused with a quick catch of her breath and Chief Burke leaned across the table.

"Go on!" he commanded in a voice of thunder. "What do you mean? 'Not quite herself——'?"

"But she was nervous, Monsieur. Fatigued and restless. The whim might have come to remain with her friends." The moment's respite had been sufficient. Matilde's tone was bland, although she spoke more slowly as if weighing each word. "I turned the handle, but the door was locked so I knew Madame was at home. I did not at the moment discover that the key was gone."

"You made no other effort to arouse your mistress?" Paul took up the inquiry once more.

"Not then, Monsieur. I knew that Mademosille Adare, the secretary, would come in one half-hour and I decided that I would wait until her arrival would make it necessary to disturb Madame. But Mademoiselle Adare was late and I became alarmed! Suppose Madame were indeed ill! I went again to her door and this time I saw a tiny point of light coming through the keyhole. I bent and looked—! Messieurs, you know what I saw!"

"Why did you not give the alarm immediately?"

"But there was no time, Monsieur. I thought that Madame must be ill, unconscious, and I flew down the stairs to tell the other servants and summon a doctor when at the moment Mademoiselle Adare rang the bell."

"I see." Paul walked a few paces away and then wheeled. "Did you ever see that revolver before, the one lying beside Mrs. Hartshorne's body?"

"I do not know, Monsieur."

"Look here!" Chief Burke brought his fist down on the frail table. "What do you mean, you don't know? Speak up and don't beat about the bush!"

"Madame had a revolver, of course. I have seen hers many times, but how can I be sure that it is the same?" Matilde eyed the Chief calmly.

"What was her object in keeping a revolver? Was she afraid of burglars?" he demanded.

"What else, Monsieur?" Matilde shrugged. "Madame's jewels are of great value and always there is much money about the house."

"Had she a safe?" Paul intervened once more.

"No, Monsieur. The jewels are in my charge and the [redacted] Madame hides in odd places. It is—what do you say?—a fad of hers. There will be a hundred dollar bill between the pages of a book; two, three hundred stuffed in a vase, as much as five hundred, perhaps, slipped behind a picture."

Paul and the Chief exchanged significant glances.

"You say you had charge of Mrs. Hartshorne's jewels. Have you a list of them?"

"Certainly, Monsieur. But the jewels themselves are in Madame's bedroom."

"Who were Mrs. Hartshorne's closest friends?" Paul switched the subject of his inquiry abruptly.

"All the *haut monde*—how do you say?—the best people of Eastopolis," responded Matilde promptly.

"But elsewhere?" insisted Paul. "Have no old friends visited her? Has she never spoken of them or of her family?"

"Madame has had no visitors." A guarded look, like a veil, filmed the woman's over-bright piercing black eyes. "Nor has she spoken of old friends. Madame is not in the habit of discussing her affairs with me, but I have understood that her husband is dead and she has no near relatives."

"Her letters—surely she received letters from other places? Where did such letters come from?"

"I do not know, Monsieur." There was a trace of hauteur in Matilde's tone. "I do not pry into Madame's mail."

"But the post-marks? Have you never noticed a post-mark other than Eastopolis on a letter of hers?"

"Never, Monsieur. I do not even glance at them!" she added pointedly. "I know nothing whatever of Madame."

"That will do." Paul turned away. "You may go, but I shall want to ask you some questions later."

Chief Burke stirred in his chair and made as if to speak, but he evidently thought better of it and Matilde left the room in silence. When she had gone he turned to the younger man.

"What do you think of her, Paul? Cool customer, eh?"

"She's holding out on us. There's no question of that, sir," responded Paul. "But whether it has any bearing on the actual murder or not remains to be seen. There never was a maid yet that didn't know her mistress' affairs better than that lady herself; however, she may have a personal reason for keeping quiet. I'll get the Belmonde on long distance later and verify that part of her story, at least. Suppose we take the others now? That little secretary, or whatever she is, can wait. I'll finish with the house servants first."

The interview with the cook was productive of no relevant facts. Hannah Weeks was her name; she'd been working in Eastopolis for twenty-seven years, and only three places at that. Mrs. Hartshorne had taken her straight from the Oakleys, when they gave up housekeeping five months before, and a nicer lady she'd never worked for; kept out of her kitchen and never a complaint and paid

the bills without a murmur when they came in the first of the month. Whoever it was killed her, she—Hannah—would like to get her two hands on him.

Sadie, the little kitchen maid, was still tongue-tied and staring. She had been engaged from an agency the same week that the cook had come and had scarcely ever laid eyes on her mistress except when she received her month's wages or had looked out of the front basement windows to see Mrs. Hartshorne go out in all her lovely clothes. She slept in the same room with Hannah at the top of the house and neither of them had wakened during the previous night.

"What were you doing in the front basement?" Paul asked. "What is the room used for?"

"It's a kind of a sittin'-room Mrs. Hartshorne had fixed up for us girls." Sadie's voice sank almost to a whisper and her hands commenced to twist nervously in the folds of her apron. "Matilde, she don't never go in there but the rest of us sits there when our work is done except when Jenny's feller comes."

"Did you always watch your mistress go out?" Paul concealed a smile.

"Oh, no, sir." Sadie's embarrassment increased. "But I like to see the lights and the automobiles and the people. I never get anywheres except to a movie now and again."

There was unconscious pathos in her tone, and Paul would have dismissed her, but she appeared to hesitate.

"Is there something you want to tell me?"

Sadie shivered as if with a sudden chill.

"No, sir, only—oh, do you think 'twas a burglar killed her? I—there's folks that hang around—"

"Has anybody been hanging around here?" boomed the Chief.

Sade jumped. "No-no sir!" she quavered. "I just thought——"

"Well, you get along and send Jenny in here," he ordered good-humoredly and as the frightened girl scuttled out he added to Paul. "Movie stuff! Can you beat it?"

"I'm not so sure," the young man responded thoughtfully. "Perhaps she has seen something that she is too scared to mention."

The bell rang at this juncture and heavy feet mounted the stairs. The Chief joined them, but Paul still paced meditatively up and down the narrow space before the bay-window.

Purely routine work as it was, this examination of the members of the small household might in a chance word lend a valuable clue, and yet he shook his head abstractedly. In that silent room upstairs, now echoing with the stamping feet of the Coroner's men, Paul had come upon a detail which had escaped the observation of the others and which pointed to an hypothesis so incredible that he strove to put it from his thoughts. This was no time for vague fantastic theories! Facts were what he needed—facts and yet more facts; but the detail remained fixed before his mental vision.

The footsteps, thudding in measured tread now, came slowly down the stairs and out the front door.

Paul walked to the window. A covered wagon was drawn up where the Coroner's car had stood and a murmur that was almost a groan went up from the close-packed phalanxes of the crowd which had gathered as the men with their ominous burden appeared. Mrs. Hartshorne was leaving her pretty little house forever.

Chapter V.

A STRING OF PEARLS.

"WELL, that's over!" The Chief settled his enormous bulk carefully into the absurd gilt chair once more. "Let's get through here; I've got a lot to do downtown. Where's that girl Jenny?"

Jenny appeared, weeping afresh from the sight of her late mistress' tragic departure. She had come from the same agency as Sadie, at about the same time, and understood that Mrs. Hartshorne had just bought the house and moved in. Like the rest, she had slept undisturbed during the night, and knew nothing of the murder until Matilde came down and told them an hour or so before.

"Only Matilde didn't say it was murder," she amended. "She said poor Mrs. Hartshorne had killed herself."

"H'm!" vouchsafed the Chief.

"You take the mail from the postman, don't you, Jenny?" asked Paul hastily as if to forestall his superior.

"Yes, sir."

"You look at the post-marks, don't you?"

She nodded, wonderingly.

"Did you ever see any letters with post-marks other than Eastopolis?"

"No, sir. I thought it was queer, Mrs. Hartshorne being a stranger here; but she said something once about her folks living abroad, and I guessed maybe they was all killed in the war."

"You liked Mrs. Hartshorne, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" The tears started again. "She was never cross and cranky like some, but always kind."

"Always in good spirits?"

"Happy, like?" Jenny hesitated, and mopped her eyes with a rag of a handkerchief. "Well, yes, sir, until just the last few days. She was sick and I think she was worrying about something, too. Anyway, she changed all of a sudden."

"When did this change take place?" Paul halted before her. "You say within the last few days. What day?"

"It was Tuesday evening." Jenny drew a long breath as if glad of the opportunity to unburden herself. "Matilde was out and I hooked Mrs. Hartshorne into her dress to go to the Gaylors' dinner party. She was excited and laughing, and told me I could take the flowers that had been in the drawing-room since the day before and put them down in our basement sitting-room because—because I was expecting some company. She came back real early, much sooner than she usually does and the minute I let her in I saw that something was the matter. She just stood there after I'd closed the door as if she was sort of bewildered. Then she began to sway and I sprang forward to catch her, thinking she was going to faint, but she pulled herself together. She looked as if she'd seen a ghost and she didn't even seem to know that I was there. 'It's come!' she said, as if she was talking through her set teeth. 'It's come.'

"'What is it, Mrs. Hartshorne?' I asked her. 'Don't you feel well? Can I get you anything?'

"That sort of roused her, and she said no, that she had a headache but would be all right in the morning, and she went on upstairs to her room, hanging on to the banisters as if she was afraid of falling. And I never saw a smile

on her face after that except when the gentlemen were here."

"What gentlemen?"

"Mr. Swarthmore, sir, and the old one, Mr. Braddock."

The Chief's chair creaked ominously.

"You don't mean the munitions man and the President of the Eastopolis Trust Company?" he interjected.

"I guess so, sir. Leastways it was Mr. Cornelius Swarthmore and Mr. Wendle Braddock. I've taken their cards to her too often not to remember." Jenny picked up the thread of her narrative. "Wednesday morning Mrs. Hartshorne woke up sick, but she seemed all well again and looked lovely when Mr. Swarthmore came for tea in the afternoon. She was restless, though, and her nerves were all on the jump; I could tell that when I served the tea to them in the drawing-room. Then Mr. Swarthmore left and Mr. Braddock came for dinner, and all through the evening I could see she was just keeping herself up. The next day—yesterday—she seemed awful excited, but anxious more than happy. She went out in the afternoon—tell me, sir!" the girl broke off suddenly, "was she really shot with that little revolver of hers?"

"So we think," Paul replied cautiously. "You've seen it, then?"

"Oh, yes, sir. She always kept it in her room, but yesterday—she took it out with her."

Again the Chief's chair creaked but Paul hastily interposed.

"How do you know?"

"She dropped it in the hall as she was going out. She had stopped to give me some directions and it slipped from under the moleskin cape coatee she wore and clattered down on to the floor. I jumped back, for I was always scared of

it, but she said it wasn't loaded; that she was taking it to have it repaired. She picked it up herself while I was getting up my nerve to touch it, and went on out."

"Did you see the revolver again?"

"No, sir." Jenny shuddered. "Oh, how did anyone get in to kill her? I locked up real careful last night before I went to bed just like I always do, only I left the chain off the front door so that she could come in with her key. I'm particular about it because of there being no man in the house; and it makes me nervous to have all that money lying around, to say nothing of her jewelry."

"What money?" Paul eyed her sharply.

"Hundreds and hundreds of dollars!" She lowered her voice as if awe-stricken at the sum she named. "The first I knew of it, I found a hundred dollar bill in a little ivory box on the drawing-room mantel when I was cleaning one day about two months ago. I took it to her, but she laughed and said she was always hiding money about, that it was all right. After that I found more in all kinds of places and I begged her to put it away, for if any of it was gone of course we would get the blame—us girls, I mean. She said she wasn't afraid to trust us, and she wouldn't listen. But it made me nervous to think of it being in the house, even."

"Did you ever speak of this money to anyone outside the household, Jenny?"

"No, sir."

"Not even to your 'fellow', the one who calls on you here?" Paul pursued.

The girl's face flamed.

"I should think not! But even if I had, Harry is all right! Why, his father is a bank messenger down at the First National, and Harry himself is under bond, as they call it; he's a delivery boy for Webster and Weil, the

jewelers. I said to him only yesterday afternoon——"

"Oh, he called on you yesterday, did he?" The Chief leaned forward.

"He did not!" snapped Jenny. "I have no callers interferin' with my work in the daytime! He came here with a package for Mrs. Hartshorne."

"What was it?"

"How should I know?" she tossed her head. "It was square and flat, and it must have been a present, because she looked surprised when I took it up to her. I didn't see what was in it."

"Was this before she went out?" asked Paul.

"No, real late; after six o'clock, for she was getting ready to go out to dinner and that Red Cross dance, and Miss Adare was here, attending to some letters."

"Did you see Mrs. Hartshorne again?"

"Only as she was going out. She was all muffled up in her cloak, but Miss Adare said she looked lovely, like a queen! And to think of her now——!"

There were symptoms of returning tears and Paul hurriedly dismissed her.

"All right, Jenny. I won't ask you any more questions now. Will you tell Miss Adare that I should like to speak to her?"

Rose entered quietly and took the chair indicated. The first shock of the morning's discovery had long passed and she had forced her thoughts back to her first meeting with the dead woman, striving to recall some incident which might throw light upon the tragedy. It came to her with an element of surprise that she really knew very little about Mrs. Hartshorne.

"What is your full name, please?" It was the pleasant-faced, limping young man who addressed her.

"Rose Adare." Her blue eyes crinkled at the corners. "I don't mind your knowing that, but before we go any further I'd like to know who I'm talking to!"

The Chief chuckled in spite of himself, but Paul responded gravely:

"I beg pardon. I'm Paul Harvey, a sort of special investigator connected with the Police Force. This is Chief Burke." He waved his hand toward his superior and added: "Now, Miss Adare, you are a secretary——?"

"Visiting social secretary," she corrected him.

"Mrs. Hartshorne was a regular patron of yours?"

"Since January, when Mrs. Ledyard recommended me to her." Rose nodded. "I've been coming here three times a week and sometimes oftener."

"Have you ever encountered any house guests here?"

"No, Mr. Harvey. There has never been anyone here except Mrs. Hartshorne herself and the servants."

"You say a Mrs. Ledyard recommended you. Do you mean the wife of Colonel Amasa Ledyard?"

"Yes. She is the leader of the set Mrs. Hartshorne belonged to—the smart society crowd of the city, you know."

Paul nodded in his turn.

"And in that set, who were Mrs. Hartshorne's most intimate friends?"

Rose hesitated.

"I don't believe she had any," she ventured at length. "Mrs. Ledyard took her up first and the rest followed suit, but Mrs. Hartshorne was just friendly. She wasn't especially chummy with any of them and didn't seem to want to be, for beside the constant invitations to formal affairs which I have written declining for her, I've often heard her over the telephone, refusing invitations to little intimate luncheons and teas and card games. She was always will-

ing to attend functions for any charitable enterprise, though, except the big public ones; she'd work for those, and send checks, but she wouldn't ever go herself. That Red Cross dance last night was the first thing of that kind I've known her to attend."

"She was popular with the men of her set?"

Rose stiffened a trifle in her chair.

"I really couldn't say. She was popular with everybody, if that is what you mean."

"It isn't." Paul halted before her. "I'm not asking you for idle gossip or possible scandal, Miss Adare. This woman has been done to death; and in the interests of justice we must find out as much about her habits and associates as we can. A young woman in your position has unique opportunities for observation, and this is no time to split hairs."

"I realize that, Mr. Harvey, though as I said to Mrs. Hartshorne herself only last Wednesday morning, when she asked me if any of my other clients in her set had tried to pump me about her——"

"She asked that, did she? the Chief interrupted sharply.

"Yes, sir." Rose turned to him. "I told her then that social letter writing was my specialty, not gossip, and that my old clients well knew they could never get anything out of me . . . Not that they haven't tried!"

Paul jumped at the advantage offered by the naïve admission.

"Who tried?" he asked.

"Well, Mrs. Cowles, for one; Mrs. Bébé Cowles. And then lately Miss Ledyard." Rose paused and added quickly: "Of course, they were all more or less curious, Mrs. Hartshorne being a newcomer and alone, but there was

nothing I could have told them, even if I had wanted to. In all her correspondence I have never seen a letter from anywhere but Eastopolis; and then only the most formal of social notes and tradesmen's receipts. It came to me like a slap in the face just before you called me in here, that I didn't know a thing about Mrs. Hartshorne! I hadn't learned a thing more about her private affairs, or her people, or where she came from, than I knew the first day I came to her."

"That little v-shaped scar near the corner of her left eye; you must have noticed it," Paul remarked when she had paused again for breath. "Did she ever offer any explanation of it?"

"Yes. She told me it was a cut from flying glass in an automobile accident, but she didn't say where. It's an old scar, so it must have happened several years ago. I could tell she'd had treatment to get rid of it, but it was too deep."

"Did you observe anything else about her?"

"Well, she had the most beautiful hands I ever saw, poor thing! They were white and soft, but firm, and the fingers were long, and slim, and tapering, and as strong as wire. She had an odd trick, too, of curling the little finger of her right hand; she saw me noticing it one day and said it came from practising on the piano though I never heard her play. It was easy to see she had never done any hard work, not even played athletic games like golf or tennis."

"Did she ever seem particularly interested in any one thing; a fad, or hobby?"

"Nothing but money." Rose caught the look which passed between her interrogators and hastily amended her reply. "I don't mean that she was avaricious! I never saw a woman so careless about her jewels; and she said there was always a lot of loose money in the house. She paid my

salary promptly without any haggling, and she was more than generous, too, with her charity subscriptions."

"But you say she was interested only in money?"

"I meant financial things; the stock market was a kind of a passion with her. I've heard her 'phone her broker, Colonel Ledyard, and give him orders for deals involving thousands of dollars. For all she was gentle and soft and womanly she had a head for business that many a man would envy."

"Do you remember when she first spoke of the money she kept in the house?"

"Yes, Mr. Harvey. It was on Wednesday morning when I found the revolver under a pile of magazines on the bed-stand, and nearly jumped out of my skin! She laughed and said it wasn't loaded; that she kept it to frighten burglars away. That is how she came to mention the money."

"Now, Miss Adare," Paul returned abruptly to his first line of attack, "there is one point which could not have escaped you. Mrs. Hartshorne, I understand, was a widow. Did she have any especial admirer among the men she knew? Any suitor, let us say?"

Rose shook her head.

"I—I don't know. I heard gossip, now and then, among my other clients, and flowers were often sent to her while I happened to be here at different times—sometimes two or three separate boxes in one morning—; but I never knew from whom they came."

"And this gossip which you heard; did it concern any one man in particular?" Paul insisted.

The girl's square little chin obtruded itself.

"It was merely gossip, not scandal, Mr. Harvey, and I'd rather not say. I realize thoroughly how serious this case is, but it's all the more reason why I shouldn't drag

anyone into notoriety through idle talk, to say nothing of losing my best clients."

"You've answered my questions." Paul's gentle brown eyes grew swiftly stern. "Who was the man, Miss Adare? We won't betray your confidence, or drag him into any notoriety unless there is good reason for it, but I mean to know the truth."

Rose pondered for a moment and then capitulated.

"Oh, well, you're bound to hear it, anyway, from others, even if the papers don't hint at it; they're likely to, for I've heard he's been more attentive than ever lately. It was Mr. Cornelius Swarthmore."

Again Paul and his confrêre exchanged glances, and the former once more abruptly changed the subject of his inquiry.

"Was it Mrs. Hartshorne's maid, Matilde, who first told you of what happened here?"

"She told me to look through the keyhole," responded Rose without hesitation. "I did, and saw for myself, and then I got the policeman! There's one thing you may as well know, although I'm not insinuating anything more than I'm saying. When she let me in at the front door, Matilde told me she'd been waiting for me; and I could tell then by her eyes that something was wrong. Afterward, when I saw poor Mrs. Hartshorne lying there and asked Matilde why she hadn't gotten help at once, she said she had only looked through the keyhole herself a minute before I came."

"That is in accordance with the statement she has just made," observed Paul.

"It is not true, nevertheless," Rose returned calmly. "She had known it for hours; it was written all over her! There hadn't been any sound of her running down the stairs to let me in when I rang; my hand wasn't off the bell before

the door was open, as if she'd been standing there just on the other side of it. Moreover, now that I think of it, she said I would know best what to do; that Mrs. Hartshorne might not have only fainted. Maybe, having been the first to find her, she was afraid of being accused of knowing more about it than she did."

"Very likely," commented Paul drily. "You were here last night before Mrs. Hartshorne left to go out to dinner, weren't you?"

"Yes. She sent for me to write some notes for her—answers to invitations which required an immediate reply."

"You said that flowers frequently came for her while you were present. Did nothing else of any greater value come? . . . Last night, for instance?"

Rose eyed the young man speculatively, and reading a partial knowledge in the significance of his smile, she responded:

"Yes, and last night was the first time. Oh, she'd had books and candies and things like that before, but never jewelry. A box came while I was finishing the notes and she cried out in surprise when she opened it. I don't wonder, for I've never seen anything so beautiful. No one in Eastopolis has anything to equal it. It was a string of pearls—big, round, perfect ones with a kind of a milky gleam through them; the same that were about her neck, poor thing, when she lay dead there on the floor this morning."

"Did she mention who had sent them to her?"

"No. There was a card with them—a man's card, by the narrowness of it; but I don't know what name was on it."

Paul paced meditatively across the room and back before he spoke again.

"Miss Adare, when you came on Wednesday morning did you notice anything unusual about Mrs. Hartshorne? Any change in her from the time of your last previous call?"

"Only that she looked terribly ill. She said it was only a headache, but if the hand of death had been on her then she couldn't have been more white. She told me that she must look particularly well for that afternoon, and I advised a touch of rouge."

"Do you know why she wanted to look so particularly well that afternoon?"

The girl's hesitation was but momentary.

"Well, she didn't tell me, Mr. Harvey, but as I was leaving I heard her giving orders to Jenny about a visitor coming for tea." Then, anticipating the inevitable question, she added: "Mr. Swarthmore."

Chapter VI.

THE CARTRIDGE SHELL.

THE interview with Rose Adare concluded, Ch Burke departed for Headquarters, leaving Paul undertake the examination of the Hartshorne hou Dusk had fallen when the young man completed the t to his own satisfaction and at eight o'clock he presen himself at the sanctum of his superior, who exclaimed alo at his appearance.

"Paul, you look done up! Don't go at it too hard, boy; remember the collapse you had after the Reuhl ca Of course, this is the biggest thing we've been called on tackle in years, but that's all the more reason why y should take care of yourself. I'm banking on you, the wh investigation is in your hands, and we can't afford to ha you get sick and lay down on the job."

"I won't lie down on it, Chief," Paul assured him as sank wearily into a chair and placed a huge tin cash b on the desk before him. "You have arranged about t servants?"

The Chief nodded.

"I did exactly as you asked. Jenny and the cook a that little kitchen girl have gone to their own homes; he are the addresses if you want them. I'm having the looked up and they'll appear at the inquest. The Fren maid, Matilde Benoit, I'm holding for further examinatic I cleared the lot of them out of the house after you l

and stationed a guard there. Where've you been since six o'clock?"

"Several places, but let us take this matter up, first." Paul produced a key and unlocked the box. "Here is Matilde's list and the jewels check up all right with it; not an item missing. There is no mention of the string of pearls, but as it only arrived last night she evidently hadn't time to add it to the catalogue. Quite a collection, Mrs. Hartshorne had; roughly speaking, I should say it aggregated about twenty thousand dollars, exclusive of the pearls, of course. See! Eight rings, four brooches, a diamond wrist watch, three bracelets, a lavalliere, two pairs of earrings, and a diamond lorgnette and chain. They are not distinctive in design, though, and no one piece is of exceptional value; they might have been purchased in any first class jeweller's."

He removed a number of leather cases from the box as he spoke, and set them before the Chief, who rapidly compared their contents with the list in his hand.

"All here," he commented, as he checked off the last article. "If it's necessary to trace 'em I'll put Lumsden on it, the lad who helped you in the Van Vrenken case. Did you locate all the loose cash?"

"I think so." Paul drew a huge roll of bills from the receptacle before him. "I've ransacked every box and trunk and drawer in the house, looked in every vase and ornament and run through all the books on the library shelves. Unless she had some hidden in the coal or on the roof I've got it all; seven thousand and two hundred dollars, to be exact."

"Whew!" whistled the Chief as he examined the roll. "No wonder she kept a gun in the house and was afraid of burglars! Why didn't she bank all this?"

"I'm afraid we're going to ask ourselves a lot of questions about the lady before we discover who killed her." Paul shrugged. "Here are all the papers I found in the house; receipted bills, bank books, memoranda and accounts, an engagement pad and a handful of invitations and social letters. Nothing in the lot that gives us the slightest clue and not one of them dates back before the sixth of last November. The trunks and barrels in the store-room contained only packing materials, straw and excelsior; there wasn't even an old newspaper among them."

Chief Burke moved impatiently in his chair.

"But weren't there some old photographs lying around?"

"Not even a picture of the lady herself. We haven't a shred of evidence to connect her with any other place on earth except the statement of the Benoit woman that she was engaged from the Hotel Belmonde, in New York."

"We'll ring them up now," the Chief announced, reaching for the telephone, but his young colleague stopped him.

"I did, before I came down here. Matilde's story seems to have been straight enough. She or some woman of the same name and general appearance was employed at the Belmonde as supervisor of the linen room when Mrs. Allison Hartshorne arrived there on October seventh."

"Where did she register from?" demanded the Chief.

"From Eastopolis." Paul grinned faintly at his colleague's expression. "Gave me a bit of a jolt, too, for I thought she wasn't known here until six months ago. She stayed at the Belmonde until the fourth of November, when she left, taking the Benoit woman with her as maid. I'll take a run on to New York if it proves necessary, but I think we're going to find the solution of this thing right here in Eastopolis. I've traced her back to the very day she arrived in town."

"How?" The Chief eyed him keenly. "If you found nothing more definite in the house than you've told me——"

"Oh, I'm not holding out on you, Chief!" laughed Paul. "I looked up the real estate firm who negotiated the sale of the Farragut Street house to Mrs. Hartshorne. It was Brinkerhoff and Hammond. I got old man Brinkerhoff, the senior partner, on the 'phone at his home. He hadn't any trouble in recalling the deal after the 'Extras' that have been coming out all afternoon. Mrs. Hartshorne bought the house late in November and moved in on December first; she paid forty thousand outright for it, by check on the Trust Company of Eastopolis. She was then staying at the Granville Hotel here, Brinkerhoff told me. I stopped there on my way downtown and found she had registered with her maid on the sixth of November, so she must have come directly from New York."

"What did they know of her there at the Granville?" The Chief selected a gaudily banded cigar from the box at his elbow and sat turning it absently in his fingers.

"I had a little talk with the manager. He wasn't anxious to get the sort of advertising for the hotel that this case would give it, but I persuaded him he'd better talk to me." Paul produced his own cigarette case from his pocket. "No one called on her there at first, though the suite of rooms she had taken was suitable for entertaining; to all intents and purposes she was a total stranger here. The rector of St. George's Church, Dr. Alvin Perrine, was the first person to send up his card to her, as far as the manager can remember; I'll look the reverend doctor up later. After it was known that she had purchased the Farragut Street house and her name was mentioned in the papers on one or two charity subscriptions lists, Mrs. Amasa Ledyard called, then several other society women. It didn't take her long,

evidently, to get a foothold with the wealthiest people here. I'm going to interview a few of them to-morrow and get a line on her if I can."

"But look here, Paul." Chief Burke clipped the end off his cigar with an emphatic snap. "That's good work as far as it goes, but it don't get us anywhere. I suppose she registered at the Granville as coming from New York?"

Paul nodded.

"There, you see?" The Chief spread his hands in an eloquent gesture. "Got us running around in circles already! We don't want the history of her past life! We want to know who got in her house last night—or came in with her—and shot her dead!"

The younger man smiled patiently. He knew of his old colleague's intolerance of any but the most direct, bull-dog method of investigation and forbore to combat it openly, although pursuing the tenor of his own way which, as in previous cases, had brought success from failure.

"Of course," he assented. "But if no one saw her come in——"

"How do you know they didn't?" the other interrupted.

"I've made some preliminary inquiries in the neighborhood," explained Paul mildly. "The house on the left of hers, number one-thirty-seven, is occupied by two deaf old maid sisters named Larrabee, with a butler and two female servants. They all retired before eleven o'clock and heard nothing during the night. On the right, number one-forty-one belongs to the Wallace Davenports; large family, oldest child at home—a girl of fourteen, two sons studying aviation. Nobody there heard anything, either. Across the street the two houses directly opposite are occupied, but the two on either side of them are closed; number one-thirty-six for sale and one-forty-two boarded up. A family named

Fraser lives in one-thirty-eight, but they are quarantined; their child has diphtheria. The Sargents live in one-forty; old couple alone with a retinue of elderly servants. Their four sons are still in active service abroad. It was the same story. Nobody saw or heard anything."

"Then there's only one thing to do now." The Chief thumped his desk in exasperation. "Find out what time Mrs. Hartshorne left the dance at the Ledyards' and who accompanied her; then put him through the third degree!"

"Mrs. Ledyard is one of the first I mean to interview to-morrow," responded Paul. "I don't want to antagonize her by rushing to her to-night. You've got to handle these people with gloves, you know; they're sure of their position and can't be bullied into any admission they don't want to make as a less important person could be. There is only one thing in the world that all these fair weather friends of Mrs. Hartshorne are thinking of now and that is how to keep out of the notoriety incidental to the case. If I'm to get any real information from them I've got to go at it in a diplomatic way."

"Diplomacy be hanged!" ejaculated the Chief. "They don't run this town? I'll subpoena the lot and haul them down to the inquest!"

"And you'll get from them a bunch of doctors' certificates announcing the outbreak of some mysterious malady among the upper classes which will be incurable until the inquest is over." Paul shook his head. "Those who do appear will give only the briefest replies to the questions put to them, and they'll have convenient lapses of memory at the most important points. You said that the investigation was in my hands, Chief. Let me go it alone for awhile."

"We-ell," the other temporized. "How about this fellow Swarthmore?"

"I'll look him up, of course!" Paul rose. "Leave it to me. I've got a few more points to go into to-night, but as soon as there is anything to report you'll hear from me. By the way, you examined that revolver—or pistol, to give it its right name—didn't you?"

The Chief stared up at him from beneath his low drawn brows.

"What are you getting at, son?" he inquired.

"It is one of the new army types you know, with an automatic ejector," Paul explained blandly. "I don't think we are dealing with any ordinary murderer. A man who will fire a shot in a household of sleeping women and then stop, not only to close his victim's eyes and compose the body decently, but to *find and carry away* the empty cartridge shell and so deliberately contradict the suicide evidence he had tried to create by placing the pistol itself in the dead woman's hands;—well, unless we are on the trail of a madman I think we will have our work cut out for us."

"The cartridge shell!" repeated the Chief. "By Gad, that's one on me! It must be in the room somewhere!"

"It isn't," Paul asserted as he picked up his hat and turned to the door. "I've gone over every inch of it, and the hall, too, thinking the shell might have rolled or been kicked out there; but nothing doing. You'll hear from me to-morrow, Chief. Good night."

Leaving his colleague gaping after him in wordless astonishment, Paul made his way to the street and hailed a passing taxi.

"Number twenty-nine Cardinal Street." As he flung the address at the chauffeur and shut the door upon himself all weariness and fatigue seemed to have fallen from him. He sat leaning forward, alertly watching the string of lights dance past. The Chief had been right in one observation

at least; the next step in the investigation must be to discover with whom Mrs. Hartshorne left the Ledyard residence, and when.

"Is Mrs. Gaylor at home?" he demanded of the supercilious butler when he had reached his destination.

The latter looked somewhat dubiously from the card on his salver to the young man. He hesitated for a moment.

"Mrs. Gaylor can see no one," he announced at length, chillingly. "She has nothing whatever to say——"

"I am not a representative of the press," Paul interrupted him brusquely. "Please say that this is a matter of the utmost importance. If not Mrs. Gaylor, then I must see a member of her immediate family."

His manner brooked no denial. The butler, after another appraising glance, turned upon his heel and disappeared up the stairs. A subdued murmur of voices, as if raised in discussion, came to Paul's ears, and several minutes passed before the butler returned and reluctantly ushered him into a small reception room at the right of the hall.

Paul seated himself, but scarcely had he done so when hasty footsteps sounded upon the stairs and a chubby, round-eyed young man with a suspicion of down upon his upper lip and palpable nervousness in his manner appeared in the doorway.

"My mother is indisposed," he announced. "Is there anything that I can do for you? I am Frederic Gaylor."

"Thank you, Mr. Gaylor; I won't detain you long." Paul bowed. "My name is on the card which you are holding; but I should add that I am from Police Headquarters."

"Police?" The youthful Freddie started like a frightened colt. Then, with an assumption of dignity, he drew himself up and demanded: "What is your business here?"

"Simply to ask you a few questions, Mr. Gaylor. Of

course, you need not answer them if you prefer not to do so, but I am in charge of the investigation into the—er, sudden death of Mrs. Allison Hartshorne, and it occurred to me that her friends would like to cooperate with me in avoiding as much notoriety as possible."

"Notoriety? Lord, yes!" Freddie groaned. "That's what has broken mother all up—Mrs. Hartshorne's death, I mean, of course, I really don't know why we should be dragged into it, we know absolutely nothing——"

"You will realize, however, that it is imperative for us to trace Mrs. Hartshorne's movements last evening," Paul interrupted him suavely. "She is known to have dined here. If you will answer my questions frankly it may obviate the necessity of Mrs. Gaylor's taking the witness stand at the inquest."

"Witness stand! The mater?" Freddie's eyes goggled with horror. "It would kill her! Of course I'll tell you what little I know; that is, if you really are from the police. I've been fooled twice to-day by reporters."

Paul displayed his credentials from the Chief, then launched his first question briskly.

"What time did Mrs. Hartshorne arrive last evening?"

"At a quarter to eight; we dined at eight, you know."

"Who else was present?"

"Just the Wadleighs and the Harringtons and my father and mother; we all went on together afterward to the Ledyards' Red Cross dance."

"Did you all leave there together?"

"No. The Wadleighs went home early—couldn't stand the crush—and the Harringtons stayed later than we did. Mother had suggested to Mrs. Hartshorne at dinner that I take her home, but she had promised someone else, she *didn't say* whom."

"At what time did you reach the dance, Mr. Gaylor?"

"It couldn't have been much before half-past ten; we only wanted to put in an appearance for an hour or two. I danced the first dance with her." Freddie's round cheeks paled. "God! Think of it! And in a little while she was dead!"

"Did her manner seem quite as usual during the evening?"

"Well, no!" Freddie hesitated. "I understand what you mean, of course, but it was quite the other way around, I assure you. Mrs. Hartshorne couldn't have had the slightest premonition of—of what was going to happen later, for she was more light-hearted and gay than I have ever seen her."

"After that first dance with her did you observe who her later partners were?"

"Oh, everyone in our set crowded around, of course, and her card was filled in a twinkling." The young man shifted nervously in his chair.

"With whom did she dance immediately after you?"

"She didn't dance; she sat it out." A faint twinkle lighted Freddie's eyes for a moment. "Old Wendle Braddock isn't keen on the light fantastic."

"So Mr. Braddock was her next partner. And after him?"

"I—I really couldn't say. There was a fearful crush in the ballroom, you know. I caught an occasional glimpse of her during the next hour, but I don't remember seeing her after that."

"The next hour," repeated Paul meditatively. "That would be about half-past eleven, wouldn't it? What time was the supper served?"

"At midnight."

"And you did not see her then?"

Freddie squirmed.

"I don't remember; I don't think I did. I was seated at a corner table, anyway, facing the wall, and I didn't give more than a casual glance around at the supper room."

"With whom were you seated?"

"Mrs. Cowles and the Harringtons."

Paul was silent for a moment and then abruptly shot the question:

"Was Mr. Cornelius Swarthmore among those who crowded around after the first dance, to greet Mrs. Hartshorne?"

Freddie's immaculate shirt front crackled with the sharp intake of his breath.

"I suppose so; I don't think I noticed——"

"Mr. Gaylor!" Paul rose. "As I told you, my only object in coming here was to avoid bringing unpleasant notoriety upon anyone, but if you prefer to wait until the inquest——?"

"I don't know why you should pick on me!" broke in Freddie sulkily. "I don't want to be made out a cad by dragging others fellows' names into a mess of this sort! Why don't you ask Swarthmore yourself?"

Paul replied to the question with another.

"There is a special reason, then, why you are reluctant to mention Mr. Swarthmore in connection with Mrs. Hartshorne?"

"Certainly not!" A dull red crept over Freddie's rotund countenance and he added in naïve haste: "You'll find it out anyway, I suppose. It's been common talk in our set for weeks that he was more than usually interested in Mrs. Hartshorne; I presume you knew it already or you wouldn't *have brought* his name up.—Yes, he was one of the first

to ask for a dance. And he seemed surprised and hurt when she put him off. They had a little playful quarrel about it, as I remember."

"Did you see them together later?"

"No. Swarthmore left in about an hour; at least, I saw him making his way to the cloakroom."

"Did you speak to him?"

"No. I was seated on the stairs with—with a young lady, when he came out from the ball-room and made a dive through the crush."

"As if he were in a hurry?"

Beads of perspiration stood now on Freddie's brow.

"No! As if he were furiously angry, if you want to know! But it had nothing to do with Mrs. Hartshorne, I'm sure."

"What makes you certain, Mr. Gaylor?"

"Because in the ballroom doorway he collided with Wendle Braddock. They meet civilly enough, as a rule, when social exigencies demand it, although they've fought each other financially tooth and nail. But last night——"

"Last night—?" prompted Paul as the young man faltered.

"Well, Neely Swarthmore has a brute of a temper, you know. It's common knowledge that he once beat one of his polo ponies to death for a misplay. Possibly an incident occurred between them in a business way yesterday to add the last straw to his enmity! At any rate, when Wendle Braddock shouldered him in the jam at the ball-room door something seemed to flame right up into his face. I thought for a moment he was going to forget Braddock's age and where they were, and strike the older man. But he didn't; after that flash of rage he just threw back his head and laughed in Braddock's face. A nasty, sneering laugh! Then he bolted."

"And Mr. Braddock?"

"He acted as though he didn't even see him. Whatever the deal was, Braddock must have gotten the best of it, for he went about beaming on everybody last night, more pompous than ever and exultant, like a sort of side-whiskered Monte Cristo."

"You did not actually see Mr. Swarthmore depart?"

"No. I'm not hedging now, Mr. Harvey. I don't even know that he went to the cloakroom, only in that direction; he was swallowed up in the crush."

"Did you see Mrs. Hartshorne after that? Was she still as unaffectedly light-hearted?

Freddie gazed wide-eyed at his interrogator and his voice sank to a whisper.

"No. I did not see Mrs. Hartshorne again."

Chapter VII.

LIES.

"A string of pearls, I think you said?" Mr. Webster, senior member of the firm of Webster and Weil, jewelers, took off his glasses, wiped them methodically on a small square of cloth and replacing them, stared hard at the young man with the ingratiating smile who stood before him in his private office. "Sold on Thursday last?"

"Delivered on Thursday." The smile faded abruptly as Paul added: "Mr. Webster, you cannot pretend that a transaction of such magnitude has slipped your mind! Thirty-odd thousand dollars is not paid every day for a bauble even in such an establishment as yours. Harry Donnell, one of your special messengers, is known to have delivered it at the Farragut Street house at half-past six on that day, and the case in which it came has your firm name stamped on the satin lining of the cover. That string of pearls was about Mrs. Hartshorne's neck when her body was discovered. I want to know who purchased them."

Mr. Webster stroked his chin reflectively.

"You place me in an extremely difficult position, Mr.—er—Harvey is the name?—extremely difficult!" he said at last. "Much of our business is of a semi-confidential nature, and especially under these tragic circumstances—our client would be highly incensed——"

"Not half as incensed as you will find the Chief of

Police, if you attempt to withhold information from him," Paul interrupted blandly. "The next time a thief like Van Vrenken succeeds in substituting spurious stones for your best diamonds under the very eyes of your shop detectives you will not find it so easy to enlist the aid of the Department."

Mr. Webster's bald head turned a delicate pink.

"Van Vrenken?" He stammered. "But Chief Burke assured me that our having been among those duped by that rascal should be kept secret! The reputation of our house depends upon it! How do you come to know——?"

"Simply because I happened to be the man who caught Van Vrenken," replied Paul with a touch of impatience.

"You?" The jeweler's manner changed swiftly. "My dear sir! Why didn't you say so at first? Any favor that I can grant you, under these circumstances——"

He slid from his chair and waddled over to the safe built into the opposite wall. He took from it a ledger almost as portly as himself.

"If a sale was made such as you describe," he said, "it will have been recorded here. Our client will look to us, naturally, to keep the transaction confidential; but if the Police compel us to produce our books we have of course no choice in the matter. On this page, Mr. Harvey."

With an inward smile at his informant's sophistry, Paul bent over the ledger and ran his finger down the column of figures. They ranged in amount from a few dollars well up into the hundreds, but not until he had reached the bottom of the page did he find recorded any sum approximating that which he sought. The final entry was thirty-two thousand dollars, and after a quick glance at the article listed and the name of the purchaser, Paul closed the *ledger.*

"Thank you, Mr. Webster," he said quietly, "that is all I wanted to know."

Out in the flood of spring sunshine once more, Paul made his way to the Ledyard residence as if in a daze. Frederic Gaylor's statement on the previous evening had received surprising confirmation. Several points that had eluded the detective were now plain to him, but the new phase led to a chain of reasoning he was not prepared to accept.

The argument he had used at the Gaylor's had evidently preceded him with good effect, for he found no difficulty in gaining an audience with Mrs. Ledyard. Indeed, that lady descended to the drawing-room with a promptitude which hinted that his call had not been unanticipated.

"This is a most frightful thing, Mr. Harvey!" she exclaimed. "I do hope you will be able to keep us all out of it! Of course I need not assure you that we know nothing of the shocking affair except what we have read in the papers, but the fact that the woman was received here as a guest in my home will bring the most disgraceful notoriety about our ears!"

"Not necessarily, Mrs. Ledyard," demurred Paul. "Mrs. Hartshorne was received by practically all the best people in town. They must share with you what publicity may come—although I understand you were her social sponsor——"

"By no means!" she corrected him in haste. "Dr. Perrine was responsible for her introduction to society here. She appeared at chuch, made lavish contributions to charity, and conducted herself in every way as if she were quite our sort. Dr. Perrine positively urged me to call upon her, and so did my husband; she had started to operate extensively on the stock market through him and had placed a substan-

tial amount of capital in the Trust Company of Eastopolis through our old friend President Braddock. When I learned that she had purchased a home here and intended to settle down among us I felt it my Christian duty to call. If others of our set followed my example that was no affair of mine; I did not introduce her!"

"Nevertheless I was given to understand you were Mrs. Hartshorne's friend," Paul asserted significantly. "Just because the lady has had the misfortune to be murdered it does not necessarily follow that she is guilty of any crime on the social calendar."

"It will be a lesson to me, however, not to take up anyone else of whom I know nothing!" Mrs. Ledyard retorted. "The motive was not robbery, and it is sure to prove to have been something disgraceful! I cannot think why we should all have been so blind! Of course, Mr. Harvey, I should not speak so candidly to anyone else, but we are at your mercy and I feel that absolute frankness is our best course. I did give Mrs. Hartshorne the *cachet* of my approval, I was among the first to open my home to her and I do not want to make myself ridiculous by admitting my mistake now to the world. It is a most deplorable situation!"

"A most unusual one," he amended. "Is it possible that in all your acquaintance with Mrs. Hartshorne she told you nothing of her life, gave you no inkling whatever of the past?"

"Not a syllable," Mrs. Ledyard replied impressively. "It is almost incredible, I know, but she slipped into our lives here with so seemingly little effort that before we realized it she was quite one of us. My daughter was right; Dr. Perrine should have looked into the woman's ante*cedents most* carefully before he foisted her upon us! But

he was so sure that there could be no question about her. And President Braddock, also, when the discussion arose assumed such an unqualified stand in her favor that the significance of her reticence about the past did not appeal to me as forcibly as it should have done. Then, too, I am quite willing to admit that her charm of manner wholly disarmed me from the first."

"Mrs. Ledyard, when did this discussion take place?"

Realizing her slip she hesitated, biting her lips.

"I—I really couldn't say, Mr. Harvey. Some little time ago."

"Can you remember where it occurred?" At the hint of polite sarcasm in his tone she reddened.

"Here in my own drawing-room. It was after a small informal dinner—" Mrs. Ledyard paused.

"Who was present?"

"Really, I—I cannot remember!" She drew herself up majestically. "I do not see the pertinence of your questions, Mr. Harvey! A mere, idle conversation in my home, among my family and an immediate friend or two, can have no bearing on the affair you are investigating."

"Perhaps I may be able to assist your memory," Paul suggested, ignoring her protests. "Your daughter, Dr. Perrine, President Braddock and yourself you have already mentioned as having taken part in this discussion. It is reasonable to suppose that your husband also was present. Who else?"

"Mrs. Cowles." The response came unwillingly enough. "Mr. Harvey, I simply must decline to pursue the subject——"

"We will drop it if you insist." He assured her quietly. "Dr. Perrine and President Braddock will doubtless be able to recall the incident if subpoenaed for the inquest——"

"I cannot imagine why you attach such extraordinary importance to so trivial a circumstance!" Mrs. Ledyard interrupted indignantly. "I understood your object in coming here was to aid us in avoiding notoriety, not to thrust it upon us! We none of us know anything whatever of Mrs. Hartshorne; an expression of personal opinion concerning her cannot be construed as evidence against us! Surely you are not mad enough to think that we had anything to do with the woman's death!"

"No. But your coterie is a representative one, Mrs. Ledyard," he explained suavely. "A concensus of opinion expressed here will enable me to gauge the attitude of the rest with whom Mrs. Hartshorne came in social contact. That is important. Surely you can remember now when this conversation took place! Do you frequently bring together just these three guests in particular?"

"No, it was quite informal Mrs. Hartshorne herself dropped in later with Mr. Swarthmore for a game of bridge, but they did not stay, as Mrs. Hartshorne complained of a headache." She paused and added with obvious reluctance. "It was last Tuesday evening."

"And who started the discussion?" Paul gave no evidence of the significance her admission held for him.

"I haven't the least idea. I really paid little attention."

"Was it not your daughter? If Dr. Perrine and President Braddock took issue with her——"

"My daughter was wholly indifferent to Mrs. Hartshorne! From the first she has maintained the merest acquaintanceship with her," Mrs. Ledyard interrupted in unguarded haste. "She happened to ask Dr. Perrine what church Mrs. Hartshorne attended before coming here and when he professed ignorance she remarked upon the fact of how little we really knew of this woman whom we had

accepted without social or financial credentials. That is really all there was to it, Mr. Harvey, and if you want the concensus of opinion, in which I must admit I shared, it was that Mrs. Hartshorne despite her reticence was a worthy and welcome addition to our community."

"She did vouchsafe the fact that she was a widow, did she not?"

Mrs. Ledyard sighed in audible relief at the change of topic.

"Yes, and she intimated to me that her married life had not been an unqualifiedly happy one. I don't know how I gathered the impression—certainly not in as many words from her—but I fancied that her husband was much older than she, and somewhat of a care. I inferred that they had traveled a great deal, presumably for his health. That is really all I can tell you, Mr. Harvey."

"Did you see her between Tuesday evening and your Red Cross dance on Thursday?"

"Yes. I met her at the dedication of the playground for the children of St. George's church on Thursday afternoon. I was with Dr. Perrine, and she merely stopped to chat for a moment."

"She was wearing a mole-skin cape coatee, was she not?"

"Yes." Mrs. Ledyard glanced up in surprise. "I remarked upon it, for the day was unusually balmy, but she said she had felt a slight chill."

"She gave no evidence of it when she came to the dance in the evening with the Gaylors, did she?"

"No. She looked remarkably well. They came late, and in the crush of of outsiders to be taken care of I did not think of Mrs. Hartshorne again after the first greeting."

"You do not know when she left? She did not take leave of you?"

"How could she? If you could imagine the crowd, Mr. Harvey! The house was packed to the doors! I did not even catch a glimpse of many of my personal friends whom I know were here. It was a charity affair and I had my hands full keeping everything running smoothly."

"Are you sure you did not see her in the supper room? Please think carefully, Mrs. Ledyard; it is of the utmost importance."

"Quite sure," the lady asserted in evident sincerity after a moment's thought. "I cannot recall seeing her again."

And with this Paul Harvey was forced to be content. Promising to shield Mrs. Ledyard and her family as far as was possible from the publicity incidental to the tragedy, he took his departure and made his way to the imposing apartment house where Mrs. Cowles had established herself.

It was evident that no fear of notoriety actuated her prompt reception of him. A lively interest sparkled in her eyes and she held out her hand with gushing warmth.

"I've heard of you, Mr. Harvey; Mrs. Bainbridge told me all about the marvelously clever young man who recovered her tiara from that notorious diamond thief; what was his name? I know you've come to ask me about Mrs. Hartshorne, but I don't know anything; I only wish I did! I'm simply dying of curiosity! Do sit down and tell me if you've discovered anything?"

Paul smiled.

"I sympathize with you, Mrs. Cowles; I'm curious, too. Mrs. Hartshorne seems to have been quite a person of mystery."

"Well, it's a mystery to me how she ever succeeded in pulling the wool over Mrs. Ledyard's eyes! If your right hand puts a large enough check in the collection plate I

don't think Dr. Perrine bothers very much about what your left hand may be doing, but Mrs. Ledyard usually looks out for that. We always follow her lead, you know; saves us a lot of trouble to discriminate. I suppose she is simply wild now to think what a fool she has made of herself!" Bébé gurgled joyously. "I rather fancy she won't be permitted to forget it very quickly! Personally, I liked Mrs. Hartshorne, but I found her a trifle dull, and *so* goody-goody; *that* ought to have made me suspect her, it wasn't natural. However, I thought it was only a pose to attract the men. Heaven knows, it worked, if it was! There wasn't any age limit to *her* draft, from Freddie Gaylor to old Mr. Braddock!"

"But I understand someone did voice a suspicion of her antecedents, and that very recently," Paul remarked. "Do you remember a conversation at the Ledyards' last Tuesday evening?"

Bébé's eyes opened wide.

"You mean that outburst of Trix—Miss Ledyard's? Oh, nobody took that seriously!"

"Why not?"

"Well, Mrs. Ledyard wouldn't admit the possibility of her having made a mistake in taking up Mrs. Hartshorne. She was bound to stand by her, and the men were all prejudiced in her favor."

"And you, Mrs. Cowles?"

"It did seem rather odd, when Miss Ledyard put it to us so strongly, that we hadn't even attempted to find out anything about her, but I never gave it another thought until the 'Extras' came out about the murder."

"What cause had Miss Ledyard for her suspicion of Mrs. Hartshorne?" Paul bent slightly forward. "Can you recall in just what words she expressed her doubts?"

"Oh, she said we had all taken Mrs. Hartshorne on blind trust merely because she had a Madonna face, an ingratiating manner and ready cash." Bébé shrugged. "She didn't mean anything, really. I don't believe Trixy had an idea in her head that there might actually be something—well, a little queer, about Mrs. Hartshorne. You know how it is when a person is jealous; they just want to start something."

Bébé had spoken in unguarded candor, forgetful, for the moment, of the identity of her visitor, but Paul's inscrutable face betrayed nothing of the surprise her idle disclosure had caused him.

So Beatrice Ledyard had been jealous of the dead woman! There were only two men whose names had been mentioned as being other than the merest acquaintances of Mrs. Hartshorne. It was inconceivable that Miss Ledyard could have resented the elderly Mr. Braddock's chivalrous attention to the newcomer. He tried a shot in the dark.

"But Mr. Swarthmore——?"

"Oh, Neely Swarthmore is a beast!" Bébé shuddered. "Trixy was well rid of him, if she only knew it; I think her pride was hurt more than anything else to think a quiet, dove-eyed, designing widow should come along and take him away from her. Mrs. Hartshorne walked in at the Ledyards' right in the midst of that conversation, you know, and Mr. Swarthmore was with her. Trixy took the bit in her teeth, so to speak, and right there and then commenced to question Mrs. Hartshorne about where she had lived before coming here. She received only evasive replies, of course, until Mrs. Hartshorne developed a sudden headache and went home."

"They had come to fill in at bridge, had they not, she and Mr. Swarthmore?"

"Yes. It was quite too bad of Trixy to spoil the evening, for there was always a chance for excitement when Mrs. Hartshorne played; she had the oddest streaks of luck I've ever seen."

"In what way?" Paul glanced up quickly. "She was not a consistent player, you mean?"

"On the contrary. Her play was steady enough and in our baby, cent-a-point games her winnings were on an average with the rest of us. It was only when we played occasionally for high stakes that the cards seemed to run for her. She held the most phenomenal hands; tricky ones, too, but she plunged on them and invariably won. Her finessing was marvelous. Why, if she had actually known what cards lay in each of her opponent's hands she couldn't have led more surely. You've heard, of course, of her brilliant coups on the stock market? She certainly had gambler's luck, although it deserted her in the end, didn't it?"

Paul nodded gravely.

"You were present at the Ledyards' Red Cross dance?" he asked.

"Yes. Mrs. Hartshorne was a revelation, simply *stunning!*" Bébé caught herself up with a sharp intake of her breath. A deep flush brought out the rouge upon her cheeks in dabs of meretricious pink and a look of startled, belated caution crept into her ingenuous eyes.

Paul was as instantly on the alert as though her mental processes were exposed to his searching gaze. Mrs. Cowles had been utterly unconscious of the insignificance of her admissions against her bosom friend Beatrice Ledyard, yet the mention of Mrs. Hartshorne's presence at the dance had put her instinctively on her guard. She was thinking not of her friend now but of herself. What had occurred

at the Ledyards' that night which for her own sake she must conceal?

"You arrived before Mrs. Hartshorne?" he asked.

"Yes. She came with the Gaylors." Her brief reply was in marked contrast to her previous loquacity.

"Mr. Swarthmore had also preceded her?"

"Yes. The Gaylor party was among the last to arrive."

"Did you have any conversation with Mrs. Hartshorne?"

"No, I merely nodded to her. The crush was awful." Bébé stirred uneasily.

"Were you near her at any time during the evening, Mrs. Cowles?"

There was a perceptible pause before she responded in low, hurried tones:

"No, I don't think so. I—I didn't observe her; if I was."

"Do you know when she left?"

"No. I cannot recall seeing her after the early part of the evening—" Bébé's breath caught again, uncontrollably.

"You were seated at a corner table in the supper room with young Mr. Gaylor and the Harringtons," Paul remarked with a new note of firmness. "You must have had a comprehensive view of the room. Where was Mrs. Hartshorne seated?"

"I—I didn't see her!" Bébé had taken swift alarm. "How did you know where I sat, Mr. Harvey? And what in the world has it to do——?"

"I am trying to fix the hour of Mrs. Hartshorne's departure," he explained patiently. "When was the last time you saw her, Mrs. Cowles?"

"Oh, some little time before supper; three or four dances, at least. She passed me in the conservatory."

"Who was with her?"

"I don't know; I couldn't see" Bébé's heavily ringed hands were twisting now in her lap. "That jazz band was playing so loud you couldn't have recognized anyone by their voices."

"Did you remain in the conservatory?"

"No. I went and sat out the next dance with Freddie Gaylor on the stairs."

"Then you saw Mr. Swarthmore leave?"

She nodded.

"You've been talking to Freddie, haven't you? Yes, I did see him making his way to the cloak-room. I—fancied from his expression that he was put out about something, but he is usually boorish, you know; it is a sort of a pose with him. He abhors a crush and that crowd must have put his temper on edge."

"Did Mr. Braddock, too, leave soon after?"

"Oh, no! He took Mrs. Ledyard in to supper and stayed until the last," Bébé responded eagerly at the change of subject. "I recall that particularly because he went all about looking for Mrs. Hartshorne. I gathered that he expected to take her home, but she must have slipped away early."

"Mrs. Cowles," Paul leaned forward earnestly and stared into her shallow eyes, "did you see or hear anything at the dance which could possibly have any bearing upon the crime which followed it? Anything which however remotely suggested a motive of enmity toward Mrs. Hartshorne?"

Bébé's eyes wavered and fell, and the flush receded, leaving her face ghastly beneath the masking rouge.

"No, Mr. Harvey. What could there have been to see or hear? As far as I know, Mrs. Hartshorne had not a—an enemy in the world."

Chapter VIII.

A BRIBE THAT FAILED.

AS the elevator bore Paul swiftly to the street level his thoughts were fixed upon the problem with which the volatile witness upstairs had presented him. What scene had occurred at the Ledyards' which she must conceal because of the part that she herself had played in it?

He had made no mistake in reading her character. Vain, selfish, indolently pleasure-loving as she was, Mrs. Cowles possessed a highly developed shrewdness where her own interests were at stake; careless as to the result of her revelations concerning her friends, she yet instinctively guarded against placing herself in an equivocal position.

Her statement that she had not been near Mrs. Hartshorne at any time during Thursday evening had been contradicted by her admission that she had passed the other woman in the conservatory, and her denial that she recognized Mrs. Hartshorne's companion was as palpable a falsehood as her final statement. He had no doubt that in her own mind there lurked at least a suspicion of the possible motive for the crime.

Why, too, had she herself mentioned Mr. Swarthmore's obviously angry mood as he forced his way through the crowd toward the cloakroom and then sought to belittle that anger by the suggestion that it was a mere irritation at the crush which hemmed him in? Was she seeking to discount anything Freddie Gaylor might have revealed to him?

Had she also witnessed that meeting in the doorway between Swarthmore and President Braddock?

So preoccupied was he when he reached the sidewalk that Paul took no heed of a small, slender, vivacious figure which all but collided with him. He would have passed on obliviously had not she hailed him shyly.

"Good morning, Mr. Harvey."

"Miss Adare!" He clasped her frankly extended hand. "This is fortunate, for I had meant to look you up later. Where are you going?"

She nodded laughingly toward the entrance of the apartment house he had just left.

"To write some notes for Mrs. Cowles," she replied. "I'm early to-day, though, and I can turn and walk on a bit with you if you like. There's something I think I ought to tell you; it's just a little thing that Matilde said to me when we found Mrs. Hartshorne's body, but I can't make head or tail of it."

"Thanks, I'd like to hear." He glanced quickly, appraisingly at her as she fell into step beside him. "Anything bearing on this affair, no matter how trivial, may be of inestimable help to me."

"Well, when I realized that Matilde must have known what had happened long before I came, and just left Mrs. Hartshorne lying there without calling for help or giving the alarm or anything, I thought it was the most heartless thing I ever heard of; and when we stood together looking down at the poor thing's body and she with never a tear in her eye I had to speak! I asked her how she could be so unfeeling after Mrs. Hartshorne thinking she was so devoted to her. I told her she seemed almost glad of the terrible thing that had happened."

"What reply did she make?" asked Paul.

"That's what I can't understand. 'I would have followed Madame to the ends of the earth!' she said, and her eyes seemed to burn right through me, she was so earnest. 'I would have guarded her from all harm with my own life!' She meant it, too, Mr. Harvey, and that's the strangest part of it, for she added with a sudden change to the coldest sort of indifference: 'But if she has killed herself, what would you?'"

"Matilde seems to be somewhat of a fatalist," Paul commented. "You are quite certain, Miss Adare, that she meant that rather extravagant assertion of her willingness to sacrifice her own life for her mistress?"

"She meant it as much as she meant anything in this world!" responded Rose solemnly. "She's a queer woman, that Matilde! I am a pretty good judge of human nature, but I've never been able to size her up. She was respectful enough and did what she was told without a word and looked after Mrs. Hartshorne's comfort as though she took a personal interest in it, but she was always glum and repressed. It seemed to me sometimes as if she were holding herself in, watching herself, for fear she'd make a slip. Maybe I'm exaggerating, but I can't think of poor Mrs. Hartshorne without seeing Matilde standing there, looking down at her with that strange gleam in her eyes."

"But her mistress' death probably affected her more than she was willing to have you know," Paul observed. "She fainted later, didn't she?"

"Yes," Rose responded with emphasis. "She fainted when she learned through Chief Burke's talk with you over the 'phone that he and the Coroner had discovered it wasn't suicide after all, but murder! Goodness knows I don't want to suspect anyone myself in such a terrible thing as this, much less cast suspicion on them, but I can't help

feeling that Matilde knows, or thinks she knows, more about Mrs. Hartshorne's death than she'll ever tell. If she does, wild horses wouldn't be able to drag it from her!"

"Miss Adare," Paul seemed scarcely to have heard the latter part of her speech. "You refuse to gossip, I know, but you are in a better position than anyone else whom I have encountered on this investigation to hear the comments of Mrs. Hartshorne's friends upon her death and the manner of it. If I could have an assistant on this case I would like to put her in your shoes. I wonder if you would be willing to really help me?"

Rose's eyes sparkled.

"I'd give anything to!" she cried. "Mrs. Hartshorne was always kind to me and it is disgusting to see the way all those people who called themselves her friends are tumbling over each other now to get out of the way of a scandal. They couldn't praise her and flatter her enough when she was writing checks for their pet charities, but I haven't heard one good word spoken for her now that she's dead. I don't believe their remarks would help you, Mr. Harvey! But was it something in particular that you wanted me to try to find out for you?"

"Yes. I'm going to be absolutely frank with you. Of course, I've only begun my investigation, but so far I can't find anyone who is willing to admit that he or she recalls seeing Mrs. Hartshorne later than half-past eleven or so on Thursday night at the Ledyards' dance; no one seems to know when she left for home or who accompanied her. It seems inconceivable that she should have slipped away without a word to anyone. Now, don't you think," he lowered his voice persuasively, "that you might be able to lead the conversation around to that point when your clients mention the murder to you? They are bound to do so,

for all the papers mentioned you as the first to discover Mrs. Hartshorne's body and summon aid, and they will all be bursting with morbid curiosity. See if among them you cannot find one who saw her leave the Ledyard house and at what hour."

"I'll try," promised Rose, somewhat dubiously. "I would be doing no one any harm with that kind of gossip, but suppose those who do know what time she left and who went with her have a reason for not talking about it? Perhaps someone in the neighborhood saw her when she came home; if she wasn't in somebody's private car she must have had a taxi, dressed as she was, and the sound of it in that quiet street late at night may have disturbed someone who was wakeful. Did you think to make inquiries across the street, Mr. Harvey?"

"I've canvassed the neighborhood pretty thoroughly," he replied with an inward smile at her naïveté. "No one appears to have seen or heard her, but as they even failed to hear the pistol shot later, that isn't to be wondered at.— No, Miss Adare, I think you have a far better opportunity than I to get at the truth about this by starting from the other end; the time Mrs. Hartshorne was last seen at the Ledyards' house."

"I'll do the best I can," Rose repeated as she paused and held out her hand. There was an absent-minded quality in her tone and she blinked as though a new idea had presented itself to her. "I must go back now or I shall be late. If I find out anything where can I let you know?"

Paul drew out a card case and scribbled upon an oblong of cardboard.

"There is my telephone number," he said. "I am grateful to you, Miss Adare, and I shall look forward to hearing *from you.*"

He watched her buoyant little figure as she retraced her steps until she was lost to view in the mazes of traffic at the corner. He could not explain even to himself what unprecedented impulse had moved him to take her into his confidence and enlist her aid. Instinct rather than reason had assured him that she was to be trusted. Even at their first interview he had acquired a lively respect for her powers of discernment. He had spoken in all sincerity when he told her of his belief that she could help him, for only in learning at what hour and under what auspices the woman now dead had returned to her home could he advance a step forward in his investigation. And Rose Adare in her confidential capacity would have more real information thrust upon her than he could hope to glean.

Paul stopped for a chop and a cup of coffee at a nearby restaurant and then entered the telephone booth. The doors of the Eastopolis Trust Company had closed at twelve, it being Saturday, and Paul surmised that President Braddock would be in no state of mind to brave any of his clubs, where the sole topic of conversation and conjecture would be the murder which had shaken the social structure of the city to its foundations.

He rang up the Braddock house and a quavering, ancient voice replied: "Mr. Braddock cannot be disturbed, sir."

"Kindly tell Mr. Braddock that I shall only detain him for a few moments. I have a message on a private matter from the Chief of Police."

There ensued evidently a hurried colloquy at the other end of the wire, for Paul caught the echo of an indistinguishable mutter which broke in upon the butler's high-pitched tones. Then the latter spoke again.

"Mr. Braddock will see you, sir, if you can come at once."

The old mansion which had sheltered three generations of Braddocks was a venerable pile of brown stone situated on the corner of what had once been the most fashionable square in the city. It was still exclusive, for the property of the deserters who had followed the upward trend of a more modern day had been bought in by the old guard which still remained faithful to earlier traditions, and no bustling shop or towering office building had invaded its sacred precincts.

Everything about it spoke of permanence, of a solid aristocracy as old as the nation and as secure, and to Paul as he mounted the steps and lifted the antique bronze knocker, there came an incongruous thought of that other house a mile or two uptown, impudent in its modernity but dainty and charming and exquisitely appointed; the house where a woman of mystery had sought sanctuary and found the end of all things.

The butler was white-haired and tremulous with palsy, but he bowed with a consummate blend of deference and patronage to the representative of law and order, and led him up the wide staircase to a library or den on the second floor.

A figure clad in a purple silk house-robe rose from the depths of an armchair beside the empty hearth. Paul was constrained to look twice before he recognized the President of the Eastopolis Trust Company. The white side-whiskers straggled forlornly from the flabby, pendulous cheeks, which had assumed a pasty gray hue, and the sleek, portly body seemed oddly limp and shrunken, like a deflated balloon. Braddock had aged in appearance ten years at least. As he peered at his visitor and waved him toward a chair he looked full seventy years instead of the sixty he had borne so jauntily.

"You have come, of course, about the property of that unfortunate young woman." It was obvious that he had carefully rehearsed his opening remark. "I have been expecting some such call from—ah, Headquarters, and I have here a certified list of such stocks, bonds, securities and cash as she had placed on deposit with the Trust Company of Eastopolis. Our auditor will go over it with you at any time and make whatever disposition of it the authorities require under these distressing circumstances."

He produced a long envelope which Paul pocketed gravely, without a second glance.

"Thank you, Mr. Braddock. The Chief will need this, of course. But I have come to discuss a more intimate, personal phase of this case than the property left by Mrs. Hartshorne."

The other shrank perceptibly into the depths of his armchair.

"There I am afraid I cannot help you, Mr. Harvey. I know nothing whatever of the lady or her antecedents. She came to me and made a large deposit in cash and negotiable securities and bonds. Later I met her socially in the best houses. That is really all that I can tell you."

"But when she deposited these funds with the Trust Company did not you ask or she offer any credentials or references?" There was courteous incredulity in Paul's tone. The older man winced.

"No. It—it was an error in judgment, perhaps, but I was deeply impressed by her keen business sense and grasp of the intricacies of finance. She was an experienced speculator on the stock market. I could see that at once; keen, cool, and yet at times a daring plunger. Successful women operators are rare. For these reasons it did not occur to me to ask for credentials as ordinarily I would have."

"You met Mrs. Hartshorne frequently in society thereafter, Mr. Braddock? Did you not think it strange that no one knew anything about her?"

"I did not think of it one way or another!" Mr. Braddock retorted testily. "She was a charming young woman with poise, intellect, obvious breeding and independent wealth. She needed no other passport than those assets."

"You became one of her closest friends, did you not?" asked Paul coolly.

"I should scarcely go so far as to claim that honor! I was interested in the young woman in a paternal sense. I frequently advised her in her financial transactions and she relied upon my judgment. Naturally, I paid her the little perfunctory attentions which a man of the world extends to a charming woman whose hospitality he occasionally enjoys; flowers, and that sort of thing. That marked the limit of our acquaintanceship."

"You knew of Mrs. Hartshorne's habit of keeping comparatively large sums in cash in her house?"

Mr. Braddock nodded.

"Yes. I have more than once remonstrated with her about it. It was a foolish, indeed dangerous proceeding. But it was an idiosyncrasy—one of the little inconsistencies of her sex which it is impossible to combat. I thought of it at once when the horrible news of the tragedy came, but I understand that the motive is not believed to have been robbery——?"

His voice trailed off into a tremulous silence. Paul remarked sympathetically:

"Her death and the manner of it must have been a profound shock to you, Mr. Braddock!"

The other peered at him suspiciously from under lowered brows.

"It was, naturally, after seeing the young woman blooming with health and spirits only a few hours before the news came. I am not a well man, Mr. Harvey, as you see, and the affair has greatly upset me. If there is nothing more that I can do for you, and I really do not think that I can be of any assistance to the authorities—may I ask you to excuse me?"

"Just a moment, Mr. Braddock. You dined with Mrs. Hartshorne at her home on Wednesday evening. I should like to know what passed between you; what the topic of conversation was throughout the evening."

"Really, young man, you go too far!" Wendle Braddock started from his chair in a spurt of resentment. His old pomposity of bearing returned; but beneath it Paul divined an underlying note of dismay akin to fear. "Our discussion was confined solely to her private affairs; her investments and speculations. I advised her about certain proposed transactions. Nothing that we mentioned could have had any bearing whatsoever on the—the tragedy."

"Perhaps not." Paul had risen and stood gazing levelly into the older man's defiant, troubled eyes. "Was it also in your capacity of fatherly adviser, Mr. Braddock, that on the following afternoon you sent to Mrs. Hartshorne a string of pearls valued at thirty-two thousand dollars from Webster and Weil?"

"Oh, my God!" The figure before him wilted suddenly, swaying toward him, and a pudgy hand gripped his arm imploringly. "Don't let anyone know! God, man, it would ruin me! I should be ridiculous, a laughing-stock, one more old fool beguiled by a designing female! Can you realize what the newspapers will make of it, and the directors of the Trust Company, to say nothing of my other associates? It is that which has been killing me! But I hoped against

hope that my purchase of the pearls would not be discovered!"

"The press has no inkling of it as yet, Mr. Braddock; we do not give out the details of our investigation unless some point is to be gained by doing so." Paul spoke in cold disgust. He shook off the detaining hand.

"Ah! Then you can fix it so that the matter will be kept quiet?" The whine took on an eager, crafty note. "It had no possible connection with the crime, you see, for the motive wasn't robbery. And I'll make it worth your while, young man! I can put you in a position which will mean a big future——"

"Stop, Mr. Braddock!" Paul drew himself up until his slight form towered above the cringing figure before him. "You misunderstood me; I am not here to be bribed! If you want to keep secret the fact that you were the purchaser of that string of pearls, it would be well for you to make a clean breast of the whole affair. What were your relations with Mrs. Hartshorne?"

Wendle Braddock gave one timorous, hunted glance at the door as if he feared the lurking presence of some unseen listener. Then he straightened and threw back his shoulders with a touch of real dignity.

"I had asked Mrs. Hartshorne to be my wife," he said.

Chapter IX.

WITHOUT ALIBI.

"YOU mean, Mr. Braddock, that a secret engagement existed between you?" Paul asked quickly.

"Not exactly clandestine." Braddock sank wearily into his chair once more. In the reaction folowing his enforced revelation he seemed more pinched and shrunken than ever. His voice was scarcely above a whisper. "There had been no time to make an announcement had we cared to do so, but it was her wish that the affair be kept absolutely quiet until—until the ceremony."

"You had only recently proposed to her?"

"On Wednesday evening." His head sunk upon his breast and his thick fingers gripped the arms of his chair. "God, what a fool! What a narrow escape! If this thing had happened later—afterwards—the disgrace of it would have killed me! That I should have succumbed to a blind infatuation, at my time of life——!"

"I take it that you did not speak in a moment of impulse." Paul interrupted his lamentations brusquely. "Mrs. Hartshorne was aware of your intentions?"

"I—I do not think so." He passed a shaking hand across his brow. "She had thought of me merely as a good friend, one to be trusted and upon whose judgment she could rely. I had considered the matter tentatively for some weeks. I had about decided to retire from active business; and the companionship of a young and charming

woman, such a woman as I believed Mrs. Hartshorne to be, would have given me a new interest in life. I had not meant to be percipitate, but a whisper of idle gossip and conjecture about Mrs. Hartshorne crystallized my determination. It should have warned me. It would have, had I not been so deeply interested, but as it was I thought only of offering her my protection against the envious tongues which assailed her.

"When I dined with her on Wednesday evening and she spoke of selling her house and going away, saying that she was depressed and lonely and had found no real friends among us but me, I—I asked her to become my wife. She seemed amazed and touchingly pleased, but feared she was not clever enough to make me happy. She would feel safe and protected with me, on her part, but I must be very sure of my affection for her. I urged her to consent. The upshot was we arranged that I should retire at once. As soon as the affairs of the Trust Company could be adjusted and my successor installed we planned to be married very quietly and go on a long wedding trip to Japan and the Far East. She dreaded the fuss and bother of a formal engagement and elaborate ceremony, and I agreed with her. God! If I could have foreseen——!"

"You sent her the pearls next day and met her at the Ledyards' dance in the evening?"

"Yes. She came late with the Gaylors, but promised me that I should take her home. We sat out several dances and then I relinquished her to other partners to avert gossip. I do not dance, nor will my liver permit me to indulge in midnight suppers. So after my talk with her I escaped from the crush with Colonel Ledyard and we went to his den for a quiet smoke. Mr. Harvey, I did not see Mrs. Hartshorne again."

He added the last sentence with marked impressiveness.

"What time was it when you retired to the den?" asked Paul.

"About eleven, I think." Braddock glanced up, surprised at the question.

"How long did you remain there?"

"I should say twenty minutes or a half-hour. Mrs. Ledyard sent for the Colonel, and I went back to the ballroom. But Mrs. Hartshorne wasn't visible and that cursed jazz band was making such a hideous racket that I was glad to get out of earshot. I drifted to the smoking-room and got interested in a discussion with Judge Talbot and some others; we must have talked for an hour or two before I went back to see if Mrs. Hartshorne was tired and ready to go home. I could not find her anywhere! No one seemed to have seen her, but in that crush it would have been impossible to keep track of anyone. I ascertained that she had not taken leave of her hostess and waited until the very last, hoping that she would reappear. When she did not, I was forced to conclude that she had either been taken ill or had grown tired, and being unable to find me had gone home alone."

"Mrs. Hartshorne kept no car, I understand."

"None. I had thought it odd, I remember, for she could well afford one; indeed, her home would have permitted her to live in a far more pretentious way than she did. But her tastes were simple and she preferred to use her capital and the larger part of her income to make more."

"What did you do when you discovered her disappearance from the Ledyards?"

"I came directly home here, myself, and endeavored to telephone her, but her house number would not answer. I supposed, of course, that her maids had long since retired

and that she herself was asleep, and I made no further effort to disturb her. I was wretched in the morning—bad attack of liver—and had to send for the doctor. It was afternoon before I was able to sit up. I was on the point of calling her up once more when—when extras were shouted upon the streets."

"What time was it when you returned to your home from the Ledyards?"

"After two o'clock in the morning." Braddock moved uneasily in his chair. "It was an inexcusable hour to have telephoned, but I was anxious; I could not understand Mrs. Hartshorne having left without making an effort to find me, unless she were ill. In the light of what did happen I understand it less than ever. What could have sent her home to her death? Who killed her?"

"I hope to be able to answer those questions some day, Mr. Braddock." Paul smiled slightly and then his face grew grave. "Did your butler or valet wait up for your return from the Ledyards, or did you let yourself into the house?"

"George is both valet and butler to me, for I have not entertained at home since my sister died. He always waits up for me, no matter at what hour I return."

"He did so on Thursday evening?" Paul insisted.

"Of course." Braddock's tone was sharp with surprise.

"Did you retire immediately after attempting to get Mrs. Hartshorne on the wire, or did you go out again?"

"At that hour? Certainly not, sir!" The pasty hue of the banker's countenance had turned a dull mottled purple. "If you are trying to connect me with that hideous affair, your inference is an outrage! What with my touch of liver coming on and my anxiety over Mrs. Hartshorne, I had a very *bad night.* George slept in my dressing-room to be within

call and I had him up a half-dozen times. He can testify to that, if my statement needs corroboration!"

"Mr. Braddock,"—Paul paid no heed to the other's indignation—"did anyone learn of Mrs. Hartshorne's engagement to you? Could anyone have obtained an inkling of it?"

"Not unless Mrs. Hartshorne herself told them, and I am sure she would on no account mention it. It was she, not I, who wished to keep it secret." He paused and then added with greater emphasis, as though to reassure himself: "No one could have even suspected it. I had been most guarded, most discreet in my attentions to her up to the moment of my proposal. There could have been nothing in the demeanor of either of us during the dance to suggest that the status of our relations had changed from the cordial friendship we had previously maintained."

Paul leaned forward and gazed straight into his host's shrinking eyes.

"Mr. Braddock, it has come to my attention through several sources that bad blood exists between you and Mr. Cornelius Swarthmore. Is this true?"

"I—I shouldn't go so far as to say that," Braddock returned cautiously. "He is of a younger generation, more pushing and progressive, and his financial methods are unscrupulous, according to my more conservative point of view. I have blocked more than one of his schemes which I am convinced were not strictly on the level. But I could have proved nothing against him; he is too wary. Naturally we are at swords' points in a business way, but as we are constantly encountering each other socially we have not permitted our antagonism to come to an open breach. I should call it merley a mutual, tacitly understood dislike."

"Do you recall colliding with him in the ball-room door

at the Ledyards during the early part of the evening?"

"Yes. It was when I had come from the den to look for Mrs. Hartshorne. I had not succeeded in finding her, and was on my way to the smoking-room as I told you, when I thought I would take a last glance about the ball-room. Mr. Swarthmore seemed to be rather in a hurry—" he paused. .

"He was rude, was he not? Almost insulting in his manner?" Paul pursued.

The other waved a magnanimous hand.

"I ignored it. Swarthmore and his moods are of no moment to me. I was not in a frame of mind to be annoyed by trifles."

"You were aware, of course—you must have been—of his attentions to Mrs. Hartshorne?"

Braddock's weak eyes snapped angrily.

"They were no more than the attentions of others in our set. I should have warned her of what manner of man he was, and his reputation with women, had there been need, but I could see that she was not encouraging him. She was discretion itself. And her nature seemed so simple, so open! How could I have been so taken in!"

"The fact that she has been foully murdered by some person as yet unknown does not necessarily suggest that Mrs. Hartshorne was the designing adventuress you seem to believe," Paul commented with studied carelessness.

"Good Lord, man, what am I to think? If the crime was not the aftermath of something in the past, what is it? And if some such secret existed and she were an honest woman, it was her duty to have told me when I offered her the protection of my name!"

"And you have no curiosity as to the identity of her slayer?" Paul rose. "You will admit, Mr. Braddock, that

for a man professedly in love, your attitude seems strangely lacking in interest."

"It was not love, at my age!" protested the banker, bleatingly. "It was blind infatuation, I tell you! Since the first shock of the news subsided I have been thinking the whole affair over, and I'm beginning to see that I'm well out of it! If I can only keep the fact of my serious intentions regarding the young woman from becoming public property, it is all I ask. The identity of the person who killed her, terrible as the crime was, is of no moment to me compared with the loss of my reputation, my dignity and my standing in this community. I cannot afford to have my name connected with this affair in any way, Mr. Harvey! As it is, I shall undoubtedly be subjected to much invidious criticism because I accepted her deposit at the Trust Company without credentials. That I am prepared to meet, but if anything more personal transpires I shall never be able to hold up my head again! I hope most heartily that the affair drops from public notice and is forgotten as soon as may be!"

"And the murderer——?"

"The murderer be—be confounded, sir! I'm thinking of myself!" His voice dropped to a whine once more. "I've told you all I know, Mr. Harvey; I've thrown myself absolutely on your discretion, your mercy! For God's sake keep my entanglement with the woman from becoming known! I haven't the least idea who killed her or the motive for the crime, and I don't want to know! I want to wash my hands of the whole affair and forget it, if I can! I'm a sick man, Mr. Harvey. You'll do what you can for me?"

"It may be necessary for you to repeat what you have told me to Chief Burke, but I think I can promise you that for the present at least your engagement and the gift of the

pearls to Mrs. Hartshorne will not be given out to the press." Paul rose once more. "If you can recall any hint which Mrs. Hartshorne may have dropped as to her past I hope you will communicate with me."

"I shall do so, Mr. Harvey, but I doubt that I will be able to help you. Ever since the news came of the murder I have sought in my own mind for a possible clue, but none presents itself. I cannot remember a single reference to her past life from Mrs. Hartshorne's lips." Braddock rose also and held out a tremulous hand. "I—I shall be eternally grateful if you will keep my connection with the whole frightful affair from becoming known."

Paul bowed stiffly and withdrew. The same cold disgust which Miss Adare had voiced arose within him at the blatant hypocrisy he was encountering at every hand. The dead woman, for all her cleverness, had made no real impression against the adamant self-interest of those with whom she had sought to ally herself. With unconscious unanimity they seemed to have virtually arraigned themselves on the side of the murderer himself, to help him keep his secret, lest something noisome be unearthed which might contaminate them.

One more interview remained before Paul proposed making his report to the Chief and as he taxied toward the imposing Bachelors' Club, where Cornelius Swarthmore maintained apartments, he mentally correlated the result of the day's investigation. Mrs. Hartshorne had undoubtedly taken fright at the direct questioning of Beatrice Ledyard, had read in it the first gathering clouds of the storm of gossip and criticism which might demolish all she had built up and end by defeating what plan she had made and ostracizing her; she had decided to flee before it, to sell her house and strike out for fresh territory, when all un-

expectedly Wendle Braddock had offered a sure means of turning possible defeat to victory. And with the first taste of triumph, the cup had been dashed from her lips!

But by whom? Why had she left the dance so secretly, and who had followed her and fired the shot which solved her problems for all time, leaving a greater, inexplicable one? Someone of all the scores who had packed the Ledyard house must hold the key to the enigma.

"If you've come about the Hartshorne case, I've nothing to say," announced Cornelius Swarthmore brusquely. "I knew her, of course; showed her a certain amount of attention because she amused me. But what her history was and what enemies she may have had she kept to herself, at least as far as I was concerned. Do you want any further statement from me?"

"Several, Mr. Swarthmore," Paul retorted. "You escorted Mrs. Hartshorne to her home from the Ledyards' on Tuesday evening. Did you observe any abrupt change in her demeanor?"

"She complained of indisposition; a headache, I think."

"Didn't this headache come on rather suddenly? Wasn't it occasioned by, or simulated because of, something which was said at the Ledyards?"

Swarthmore raised his eyes to the detective and then abruptly shifted his gaze.

"I don't remember that anything was said which might have disturbed her. The headache seemed genuine enough."

"When you had tea with her at her home on the following afternoon did she seem to have quite recovered her health and spirits?"

There was a pause and Swarthmore chuckled drily.

"Quite. I assure you she had never appeared to better advantage."

"In what way?" Paul asked quickly.

"She looked remarkably well, and seemed more vivacious than usual." Swarthmore spoke now in a guarded drawl. "Clever little woman, Mrs. Hartshorne! Must have over-reached herself, though. Too bad! The clever ones do, now and again, don't they?"

"'Over-reached herself?" Paul repeated the phrase with a rising inflection which demanded a reply.

"Well, yes," Swarthmore shrugged. "Someone must have had it in for her rather desperately, don't you think, to do what was done on Thursday night?"

"You have formed an opinion, then, as to the manner of her death."

"By no means!" the other contradicted hastily, adding with a touch of malice, "I do not profess to be superior to the Police Department."

"When you called at her house on Wednesday"—Paul ignored the other's thrust—"did Mrs. Hartshorne tell you that she thought of leaving Eastopolis?"

"She mentioned it, but I didn't think she was in earnest."

"Mr. Swarthmore, did you see Mrs. Hartshorne between Wednesday afternoon and the dance at the Ledyards' on the following evening?"

"No."

"You met her there, however? Danced with her? Talked to her?"

"She arrived late, but I had a little chat with her in the conservatory shortly before I left." The dissipated lines about Swarthmore's mouth hardened perceptibly. "I hate a mob like that. I took myself off early."

"Mr. Swarthmore, did anything unpleasant occur between you and Mrs. Hartshorne during that interview? In other *words, did* you quarrel?"

"I never quarrel with a lady." Swarthmore's drawl was insolently exaggerated. "There was no occasion, I assure you, in any event. We had a most interesting conversation, but aside from that the evening promised to be a bore and I left before supper; about half-past eleven, I think."

"Do you remember jostling Mr. Wendle Braddock in the doorway of the ball-room? Were you not enraged about something at the moment?"

"'Enraged', is scarcely the word, my dear sir." Swarthmore smiled. "I was irritated, annoyed by the crush. I don't recall Braddock particularly, but if he was in my way I probably swept him aside with little ceremony. By the way, how is Braddock taking this? By Jove, it must have floored him!"

"Why? Were he and Mrs. Hartshorne such close friends?"

Again the pause. Swarthmore laughed shortly.

"Friends? The old fool was infatuated. Gad, I'd like to see his face now!"

"Are you sure, Mr. Swarthmore? Have you any proof of this infatuation?"

"I have eyes," he returned brusquely. "He's been dancing attendance on her for weeks."

"When you left the Ledyards' at half past eleven on Thursday night, where did you go?"

"I took a walk." For the first time he seemed to hesitate. "I wanted to get the odor of that perfumed menagerie out of my nostrils. It was a wonderful spring night and I strolled about for some time before returning to my rooms."

Paul leaned forward.

"For how long, Mr. Swarthmore? What time did you return?"

"I haven't an idea." He shrugged. "Not anticipating the

fact that it might become necessary for me to establish an alibi I took no account of time."

"Perhaps the night doorman here will remember," Paul suggested.

"Oh, it was around two o'clock, I imagine." Swarthmore spoke carelessly, but his face flushed.

"In the intervening two hours and a half you did not stop anywhere? Just strolled about?"

"Precisely."

"In what direction?"

"There again I must disappoint you." His tone was coolly ironic. "My mind was engrossed in a forthcoming directors' meeting of my company and I took no note of the course of my nocturnal ramble. To save you the trouble of framing your question, I may add that it is quite conceivable I was in the neighborhood of Farragut Street; I may even have passed Mrs. Hartshorne's house, although I don't recall it. Damaging, isn't it?"

Paul rose.

"Did you encounter any acquaintance during your walk, Mr. Swarthmore?"

"None. You'll have to take my word for it, but in the event that you don't you'll find me here. However, I can assure you that I didn't kill Mrs. Hartshorne."

Chapter X.

THE CONSERVATORY DOOR.

"AND that is where we stand," Paul concluded his report to Chief Burke. "Some urgent message must have reached Mrs. Hartshorne or some sign warned her of trouble to cause her to slip away from the dance so quietly. That's the crux of the whole matter. Where did she go when she left the Ledyards'?"

"Home, of course!" The Chief stared. "You don't think she had an appointment, and went in all that regalia to keep it, do you?"

Paul smiled.

"It is within the range of possibility," he retorted. "There are one or two little points you've missed, Chief."

"Have I, indeed!" The other snorted. "Are you holding out on me, Paul, for a grand-stand play?"

"No. You wouldn't have called me in on the case if you hadn't expected me to dig up a thing or two that escaped the rest of you," Paul responded good-naturedly. "I've got an idea that I want to test before I discuss it, that's all. Did the Coroner report yet on his autopsy?"

"Yes. That's why I'm sure you are on a wrong steer if you think Mrs. Hartshorne went to any rendezvous after leaving the Ledyards'; there wasn't time. Dr. Cravenshaw says she must have been dead since around one o'clock in the morning, maybe earlier. The bullet was a thirty-two and fits her pistol, all right. She got it straight through the

heart and must have died instantly, without even a gasp."

Paul nodded.

"I've got to fix the time she left the Ledyards'," he remarked. "I'm going back there later to interview the servants; the maid in attendance in the ladies' dressing-room should know when Mrs. Hartshorne's cloak was removed. I want to get the general arrangement of the rooms, too. Some outsider must have approached Mrs. Hartshorne, and if they didn't come in on a purchased ticket I've got to find out how she could have been reached."

"You are eliminating Cornelius Swarthmore, then, in spite of his lame account of how he passed the time after he left the dance?" the Chief asked in a disappointed tone.

"Swarthmore is no fool," Paul returned. "He has had plenty of time to frame an alibi, and money to produce a string of witnesses if he had thought it worth while. His story sounds fishy, I admit, and if he were a different kind of man it would be conceivable that he had formed an opinion as to the real culprit and was trying to draw our suspicion in order to give them time to save themselves, but he's the ruthless, predatory type. Self-sacrifice is outside his category. I've no doubt that he was as infatuated as Braddock; it is highly probable that he was jealous and quarreled with Mrs. Hartshorne in the conservatory, leaving the house in a rage and walking off his black mood for the next hour or two. If her death has cut him up any, he has schooled himself not to show it. He did not manifest the slightest regret or interest in the identity of the murderer; but he seemed to find cause for a grim sort of amusement at Braddock's expense."

"I guess it lets him out," the Chief admitted grudgingly. "I suppose you saw the panning we got in the newspapers this afternoon for not getting results? If nothing further

develops we'll have to get the Coroner to hold Matilde at the inquest as accessory after the fact; she discovered the body and failed to give the alarm, and that will stall us along until she comes up for a hearing. But for the Lord's sake, Paul, start something! We've got the next election to think of!"

"I'd like to have a little talk with Matilde. Will you have her brought up?" Paul asked. "You haven't been able to get anything more out of her, have you?"

"No." The Chief pressed a buzzer on his desk. "She sticks to her story and nothing can shake her; coolest proposition I've tackled in many a day."

Matilde, when she appeared, bore out this assertion. Her sallow face was impassively devoid of expression. She waited calmly with her beady black eyes fastened upon Paul.

"You have told me that you were born in Peronne, Matilde," he began. "What year?"

"In 'seventy-six, Monsieur." The reply was prompt.

"You have relatives living?"

"I do not know, Monsieur. There was an uncle and cousins before this war, but now—!" she shrugged.

"No one else? No brothers or sisters?"

"No one else, Monsieur." Her eyes shifted and fell.

"You came to this country nine years ago. On what steamer?"

"On a private yacht, Monsieur," she paused. "The *Belle-Elise* of Monsieur Felix Courthier. I was maid to Madame."

"What positions have you held since?"

"Several, Monsieur. I left Madame Courthier to go to a widow, Madame Elmer Smith of Chicago. For three years I was with her, then she went abroad to live. She

has married, I believe, an Italian." Again there was a pause and Matilde made a little helpless gesture with her hands. "After that there were many positions—I cannot remember! One lady I did not please, another would not pay, another was indiscreet; I should have been witness in a divorce had I remained. What would you? Then I engage myself to Madame Merignac, the old lady who died last summer."

"She was French?"

"But no, Monsieur. She was of the South."

There was a shade of difference in her tone and her eyes would not meet his.

Paul asked quickly:

"From New Orleans?"

"I think that is the name of the city, but I am not sure."

"You have never been to New Orleans?" Paul gazed at her steadily.

"No, Monsieur." A faint color had crept into her cheeks.

"Matilde, you were supervisor of the linen room at the Belmonde Hotel in New York when Mrs. Hartshorne engaged you, were you not?"

"Yes, Monsieur." She raised her eyes at last.

"Your position was not one which would have brought you ordinarily into contact with the guests. How did you meet her?"

"There was a complaint about the quality of the linen on Madame's bed. I went to her apartments to attend to it and Madame was interested in me. She was most kind, most sympathetic; she persuaded me to tell her of my difficulties, my illness, how impossible it had been for me to obtain the position to which I was accustomed. Madame liked me and took me for her maid."

"*You* are quite sure, Matilde, that there had been a key

in the door of Mrs. Hartshorne's bedroom here prior to her death?"

"It was there on Wednesday evening, Monsieur, for when Madame retired she locked herself in as usual; she was forced to rise to admit me with her breakfast tray in the morning. I did not observe whether it was there or not when I prepared the room for Madame's return on Thursday night."

With this Matilde was dismissed. Paul observed to the Chief:

"I wish you would give Lumsden a complete description of Mrs. Hartshorne's jewels, sir, and let him go to New York and see if he can trace them; find out if any of them were purchased there and also if she sold others along Maiden Lane."

"I'll start him at once, but what's the idea?" the Chief demanded.

"The jewels are the only link in our hands which connect her with the past. Just because she chose to make a mystery of it is no proof that we shall find the motives for this crime in her history."

From Headquarters, armed with a blanket warrant, Paul returned again to the Ledyard residence. The same lugubriously correct butler who had admitted him in the morning opened the door, but stood blocking the entrance deprecatingly.

"Mrs. Ledyard is not at home, sir."

"I did not come to see Mrs. Ledyard. What is your name?"

"Hickson, sir." The man evinced surprise not unmixed with discomfiture.

"Hickson, I'm from Headquarters. Were you on duty here on Thursday evening?"

"Excuse me, sir." Hickson's perturbation increased, but he spoke firmly. "I shall have to ask Miss Ledyard if I am to answer questions. Colonel Ledyard has not returned yet and in his absence and Mrs. Ledyard's—"

"Ask Miss Ledyard if she will see me."

Hickson stepped aside with an air of defeat and ushering Paul into the drawing-room departed upon his errand.

After a lengthy pause, there was a swish of silken skirts upon the stairs and a young woman, clad in a clinging gown of soft green, confronted the detective in the doorway. She was tall and slender, with a wealth of deep red hair and topaz eyes which reminded him of those of some tawny cat. Curiously feline, too, were her slow grace of movement and the poise of her lissom body.

"I am Miss Ledyard. I was under the impression that my mother had told you all we knew of Mrs. Hartshorne this morning; that is, if you have come about the Hartshorne case?"

Paul bowed.

"Mrs. Ledyard replied to my questions, but I should like some additional information."

"I am sorry, but I am afraid that I cannot help you. I know no more than my mother."

"You know that Mrs. Hartshorne's past before she came here has remained a mystery; you were the first to question it, Miss Ledyard, to ask why she had been received without credentials, merely because of her personality and financial assets. What cause did she give you after all these months for adopting such an attitude?"

Beatrice Ledyard's eyes narrowed. Two pointed, very white teeth showed in the curl of her lip.

"No cause whatever. The woman was merely an acquaintance to whom I had given absolutely no thought.

My mother was most enthusiastic about her work for war charities, and it suddenly occurred to me as strange that Mrs. Hartshorne should give her time and efforts, yet sedulously avoid being seen in large gatherings; it savored of concealment more than diffidence, for she was not at all a shy or self-effacing person. So I wondered, naturally. I trust that explanation is sufficiently comprehensive."

She spoke coldly, but her tone shook with an emotion not altogether scorn or bitterness, which Paul was at a loss to fathom.

"Quite, thank you." He smiled and then his gravity returned. "Mrs. Hartshorne appeared at the Red Cross dance here, however."

"Yes. I nodded to her, but the crowd was so great that we did not actually meet." She made a motion as if to turn to the door. "Really, I cannot discuss this! The subject is too distressing. And I can tell you nothing, nothing! I am sure that if my father were at home he would not permit me to be so harassed and annoyed!"

"I have no intention of annoying you further, Miss Ledyard," Paul assured her suavely. "There are a few questions I wish to put to your servants who were in attendance at the dance, but if you prefer it I will wait here until Colonel Ledyard returns."

"Our servants?" she repeated. "The waiters for the supper were provided by a caterer——"

"But your butler officiated in his usual capacity, did he not? And one of your maids must have been in the ladies' cloak-room. They are the ones I wish to speak to."

Miss Ledyard rang the bell and almost instantly the door opened and Hickson stood expectant on the threshold. Paul smiled to himself; it was apparent that this most excellent of butlers was not above eavesdropping.

"Hickson, this gentleman would like to ask you—" his mistress began, but Paul intervened.

"The maid first, if you please, Miss Ledyard."

She bit her lips.

"Which one would you care to see? The reception room downstairs was used as a cloak-room for the strangers who came and one of the house maids was stationed there to check their wraps. Our personal friends were taken upstairs and my mother's maid attended them."

"I wish to speak to the one who waited upon Mrs. Hartshorne."

Miss Ledyard turned to the butler.

"Send Louise here."

"And you need not wait immediately outside the door," Paul supplemented pleasantly. "Miss Ledyard will ring when she requires you."

The chagrined Hickson withdrew and Miss Ledyard turned in sudden fury on her visitor.

"How dare you give orders to our servants?" she stormed. "My father shall complain of your insolence at Headquarters."

Paul drew a folded paper from his pocket.

"I have here a blanket warrant for your entire household, including the members of your family," he announced quietly. "Would you care to see it? I trust you will not make it necessary for me to use it."

"A warrant—!" she gasped. "Surely you—you don't think we had anything to do with Mrs. Hartshorne's death!"

"She was last seen alive in your house," he responded. "You must realize that under these circumstances, Miss Ledyard, a very serious interpretation would be placed upon any attempt of yours to block my investigation."

"I have no intention of doing so!" she retorted. "I

merely wish to avoid any further personal annoyance!"

A nervous tap sounded upon the door.

"In that case," Paul smiled. "I will not detain you while I question your maid."

"Thank you!" There was a glint of green fire in her smoldering eyes. "I prefer to remain. Come in, Louise!"

Louise, pretty and vapid and quite obviously frightened out of what wits she possessed, sidled a step or two into the room and halted as if poised for instant flight.

"You are Mrs. Ledyard's maid?" Paul asked in a reassuring tone.

She nodded, speechlessly.

"You were in attendance upstairs upon the ladies who came to the dance last Thursday?"

"Y-yes, sir."

"You knew Mrs. Hartshorne by sight, did you not?"

The girl shrank from him at mention of the dead woman's name and her colorless face went still more pale.

"Oh, yes, sir! The—the poor lady came here often."

"You took her cloak from her Thursday night, did you not? Do you remember, Louise, what it was like?"

Miss Ledyard's gown rustled as she made a swift movement of surprise. The maid's round eyes were staring at Paul as if hypnotized.

"Yes, sir. It was a soft blue brocaded velvet with a big cape collar and cuffs of ermine. I couldn't forget it because I had such a fright about it!"

"What sort of a fright?"

Miss Ledyard was tapping her foot impatiently at the triviality of his questioning, but Paul ignored her ill-humor.

"I thought it was stolen, sir!" Louise faltered. "I hung it with the rest in the wardrobe of the corner guest room that was being used as a dressing-room. I'd been told to

stay there, but it got late and nobody else arrived, and the music just drove me crazy, sir! When they were all at supper I stole down the back stairs and peeped in the big empty ball-room, listening; I couldn't have been gone more than five minutes. After the supper some of the ladies came up for a bit of powder, and one of them—Mrs. Cowles, it was—wanted her cigarette case, that was in the pocket of her cloak. I had hung Mrs. Hartshorne's cloak right next to it, but it was gone!—Mrs. Hartshorne's, I mean. My heart was up in my mouth, but Mrs. Cowles was going on so about the conservatory door——"

"What about the conservatory door?" Paul interposed swiftly.

"It wouldn't open. She thought Colonel Ledyard had ordered it locked just after supper to prevent strangers from picking his orchids for souvenirs, and she was put out about it. I didn't let on before the ladies how frightened I was, but when they had all gone back to the ball-room I flew down to Mary, who was in charge of the other cloak-room, and asked her if the cloak had been brought down there. She said 'no' and I went back, so sick with fear I could hardly get up stairs, for with hundreds of strangers in the house I was sure it had been stolen and I would be to blame, of course, for leaving my post. I don't know how I ever got through that night, expecting every minute that Mrs. Hartshorne would come to claim her cloak and I would have to say that it had been taken.

"But she didn't come, though everyone else did. When they had all gone, it finally came over me that she must have taken the cloak herself and gone home while I was downstairs that time during supper. It served me right for disobeying my orders, but I won't forget the worry of it to my dying day!"

She paused for breath, and Paul beamed upon her.

"You are sure the cloak was taken during the supper hour; not just mislaid and removed later, when you went down to speak to Mary, perhaps?"

"No, sir," she responded doggedly. "It was gone when I came back that first time, for I hunted high and low for it."

"Thank you, Louise; that is all I wanted to know. You may go."

The little maid needed no second permission. As she slipped from the room Paul turned to Miss Ledyard. The tapping of her foot had ceased and she sat tense and immovable.

"Will you ring for the butler now, please, or shall I?"

She motioned toward the bell, and he pressed it.

"You did not see Mrs. Hartshorne, yourself, after the supper hour?" he asked.

She shook her head and they waited in silence for the coming of Hickson.

When he appeared, wearing a consciously virtuous expression, Paul began without preamble.

"What is the rest of your name, Hickson?"

"Alfred George, sir."

"English?"

"Yes, sir. Twenty-eight years in this country, sir, and twenty of them in service here at Colonel Ledyard's." He spoke with pride.

"Married, Hickson?"

"Widower, sir. Two sons at the front and the third, William, who is chauffeur now for Mrs. Ledyard, has a shattered knee from Ypres, sir."

"What were your duties at the Red Cross dance here on Thursday?"

"I took the tickets at the door, sir, and then generally overlooked the waiters from the caterer, and kept an eye on things."

"How long were you posted at the door?"

"Until eleven, sir, or a bit after. No one arrived later than that."

"You remember Mrs. Hartshorne's arrival with the Gaylors?"

"Perfectly, sir. That was about half-past ten."

"Did you observe when she left?"

"No, sir. I did not see Mrs. Hartshorne again after she entered."

"Hickson, did you lock the conservatory door?"

There was a pause during which Hickson glanced at his young mistress in surprise.

"No, sir," he responded at length. "I heard nothing of it, sir. There must be some mistake."

"You know nothing of its having been locked during or just after the supper hour?"

"No, sir," responded the butler firmly. "And if you'll excuse me, sir, you must have been misinformed. The door may have stuck, but it wasn't locked; there's been no key to it for a long time. It stood wide open when I went about putting out the lights after all the guests had gone."

Beatrice Ledyard's tense figure relaxed suddenly and she uttered a cry of relief.

"Here is my father, now!"

Chapter XI.

"IF I HAD ONLY KNOWN!"

A KEY had rattled in the great entrance door which opened and closed with a slam and footsteps sounded down the hall.

"Father, will you come in here, please?" Miss Ledyard's voice was high pitched and strained. "There is a man from Police Headquarters——"

"What's this?" Colonel Ledyard's bald head appeared in the doorway. "Bless my soul, we're not going to get mixed up in that Hartshorne affair, are we? Why didn't you call at my office, young man, if you want any information about Mrs. Hartshorne's stocks?"

"That is not what I am here for, Colonel Ledyard." Paul turned to him. "My name is Harvey; I am a special investigator called in on this case by the Chief of Police."

"Well, Mr. Harvey, this is a most shocking tragedy, of course, but I cannot see what information you hope to gain here." The Colonel handed his hat and stick to Hickson and dismissed him with a nod.

"As far as we have been able to discover, Mrs. Hartshorne was last seen alive in your house," Paul explained patiently. "I have just learned approximately what time she left, but not the manner of her going nor if she were accompanied by anyone or alone."

"He says he has a warrant for our arrest!" broke in Miss Ledyard half-hysterically.

"Bosh!" The Colonel's stout figure bridled like that of an angry game-cock. "This is preposterous! On what trumped-up charge have you come here to try to bluff us?"

"Here is the warrant, Colonel Ledyard!" Paul extended the document. "I have no intention of serving it unless I meet with opposition to my necessary investigation here."

"H'm!" The Colonel unfolded the paper and after glancing hastily over it he handed it back as if it burned his fingers. He turned to his daughter. "Trix, I think you had better leave us. I will attend to this gentleman."

"Yes, father." Her tone was submissive, but she moved slowly and with obvious reluctance to the door.

"Now, Mr. Harvey," the Colonel began as soon as they were alone; "What can I do for you? I have no desire to impede the course of justice, but you are barking up the wrong tree if you look to get evidence here."

"Nevertheless, I should like to examine the arrangement of such of your rooms as were used during the dance on Thursday night," responded Paul. "I wonder if you would be good enough to conduct me yourself? Could Mrs. Hartshorne have departed by any other door than the front entrance, in the event that she had wanted to slip away unnoticed?"

"I never considered that. My wife did think it odd, when we were talking the affair over last night, that no one seemed to know when Mrs. Hartshorne left. There is a door leading from the conservatory down some steps into the strip of garden between the ball-room extension and the next house, but it has been locked and bolted since last autumn, and sealed with weather stripping to prevent the cold from getting in on my orchid collection." He turned to the hallway. "Come along, Mr. Harvey. I'll be glad to have you see for yourself."

Paul followed him through the succession of long stately apartments, noting the position of each. The windows were all on a level about ten feet from the ground outside and nowhere did balcony, ledge or trellised vine offer foothold for a possible intruder.

"This is the ball-room." Colonel Ledyard threw open the wide double doors and pressing a switch flooded the great, high-ceilinged room with a myriad clusters of light which were reflected in the glassily polished floor. "The stage has been set up again, you see, at the farther end. We usually place the orchestra there, but for this big semi-public affair when every extra inch of dancing space was desirable, Mrs. Ledyard had the stage taken down, and stationed the music there in that alcove; there was no need to worry about the acoustics for a jazz band."

"And this—?" Paul motioned toward a doorway in the wall at a right-angle from the alcove.

"The door to the conservatory." The Colonel waddled toward it as he spoke over his shoulder.

"Do you happen to know whether it was locked during a part of Thursday evening or not?" Paul asked as he followed.

His host turned with some heat.

"I wish to heavens it had been!" he exclaimed. "My orchids have cost me thousands of dollars and were the pride of my life. And the best of them are ruined! Some vandal trod them down. Look here!"

He led the way into the dim, cool, vault-like apartment and pointed to a mass of great purple and brown mottled bloom which hung wilted and dying from crushed, broken stems.

"I've nursed them as a mother would a child!" he lamented. "Sat up nights with them to keep the tempera-

ture just right and brought a horticulturist up all the way from Central America to try out a new method of grafting he had devised—and now look at them!"

But Paul gave no second glance to his host's hobby. He was gazing about the glass-domed room with its artistically massed flowers and narrow tiled paths winding cunningly about through aisles of arching palms. A minature fountain tinkled in the heart of the delicate greenery and rustic seats were tucked invitingly into secluded nooks and corners. Despite its beauty there was something sinister in the atmosphere, damp and heavy with the cloying mingled perfumes, which sent a chill to his bones. He shivered involuntarily.

From where he stood with his back to the orchid bank, Paul faced directly upon the row of long French windows set so closely together as to give the impression of an unbroken wall of glass that looked out upon the strip of garden. At the farther end to the right stood a narrow closed door, doubtless the one of which Colonel Ledyard had spoken.

Paul's eyes turned to the left, toward the larger, opened door which led into the ball-room. In a direct line with his gaze was the alcove and a stretch of the damask-hung wall. He turned again to the row of windows.

"Where any of these open on the night of the dance?"

"No. The ventilation came from a sliding pane of glass or two in the dome." The Colonel turned with a sigh from his mutilated orchids and started down the walk. "Come and examine the door for yourself. It hasn't been tampered with, you see. There's the padding and weather stripping I had put in last autumn, and the chain and padlock are still on, as well as the bolts. It could only have been opened if all that stuff were pried loose first."

Paul nodded as though satisfied and led the way himself back through the ball-room and into the entrance hall.

"Thank you for your courtesy, Colonel Ledyard. I may have to trouble you again in a day or two, but I won't unless it's absolutely necessary."

The Colonel waved a pudgy hand.

"That is all right. Glad to give the authorities any assistance I can, but you won't find any clue here, Mr. Harvey, to what happened after the poor little woman reached her home. Frightful thing, upon my soul! I can't think what the motive could have been; she looked no more capable of a history than a—a maltese kitten! Yet that reticence of hers—?" He broke off and added nervously: "I—I hope the Chief of Police won't consider it necessary to lay stress upon the fact that Mrs. Hartshorne was last seen alive here. If the newspapers get wind of it and play it up Mrs. Ledyard will be simply prostrated. She has been under a severe nervous strain ever since the tragedy became known."

"Unless the special article chap dopes that out for himself, I can assure you that the Chief will not tip his hand off to the Press at this stage of the game," Paul smiled. "Good afternoon, Colonel Ledyard!"

It was late at night before he found his way to the modest old-fashioned rooms where he kept bachelor's hall. The day's exertions had told upon his slender store of strength but his eyes glowed with unabated zeal from the shadowed rings which encircled them and his brain seethed with conflicting impressions which he strove to coördinate.

Upon leaving the Ledyards' he had made a wearisome round of various taxicab companies of the city, but with no result. No cab had been ordered to convey Mrs. Harts-

horne to her home on the previous Thursday night and it was inconceivable that she should have left the dance and wandered about the street bare-headed and in her evening attire until she picked up a strolling night-hawk. Some private conveyance had taken her to her home, but whose, and after what possible rendezvous?

Paul slept fitfully at last, hammering still in his half-conscious moments at the problem which obsessed him.

In the quiet of the early Sunday morning his telephone shrilled insistently and he obeyed its summons to find Chief Burke on the other end of the wire.

"Hello, Paul? Feel all right to-day?"

"Surely!" His voice rang out firmly "What's the news?"

"That little kitchenmaid from Farragut Street has disappeared. Her aunt 'phoned in to Headquarters just now. You'd better jump down there and get what dope on it you can; it looks queer to me. You've got the address, Sadie Mullen, care Peters, sixteen Sherman Place."

"I get you, sir! I'll go at once and report to you later."

Dressing hastily and snatching a cup of coffee at a nearby restaurant, Paul boarded a car for the address given. It proved to be a tenement of a model type, clean and airy, with straggling pots of geraniums on more than one window-sill, and an air of respectability and civic pride despite its poverty.

Paul mounted the narrow stairs and knocked upon the door labeled "Peters."

A tall, gaunt woman with iron-gray hair and a look of strained anxiety in her faded eyes admitted him and ushered him into a tiny, spotless kitchen.

"You are Mrs. Peters? I've come from Police Headquarters to learn what you can tell me about your niece,

Sadie Mullen," he began pleasantly.

"It's little enough, sir!" she motioned to a chair. "Do you mind speaking low? My husband's a night-watchman and he's just come home and gone to bed. I've told him Sadie was off for the week-end visiting friends, for she's like his own girl and I don't want him worried in case she turns up all right. I can't think what's got into Sadie! She's been like a crazy thing ever since she came home Friday night with the news that her lady had been murdered. You'd expect her to be sorry, and sick with the shock and fright of it, too, but not to carry on as if she'd had a hand in it herself, the silly girl!"

"What did she say?" Paul asked.

"Nothing, at first, but just that somebody had killed Mrs. Hartshorne in the night. We couldn't get another word out of her, she was dumb and white and shaking till her teeth chattered. My husband got a paper before he went out to his job and that's how we learned the details of it. Sadie had come home a little after six but she wouldn't eat any supper and shut herself in her room. Along about midnight she burst out crying something terrible, as if she'd held in as long as she could and had to let go, but although she hung on to me when I went in to her, I couldn't get a word from her except one thing she kept sobbing over and over; 'If I'd only known! If I'd only known!'"

"Didn't she explain later what she meant?"

"No, I got her quieted down finally and she went to sleep; but she must have been dreaming of it, for she started up screaming more than once. She scarcely ate a bite all day yesterday and wouldn't talk to the reporters when they came, or the neighbors, but hid off in her room and cried softly to herself. She seemed to get better, though, by nightfall, but she only shook her head when we tried to

question her and she had that stubborn look in h
that I've learned to reckon with when she was a lit
She gets streaks of that queer, mulish spunk when s
have her own way if it kills her, and I could see she'
up her mind to something, but little I guessed what!

"My husband went to his job at eight o'clock las
and I stepped out to a neighbor's, just a few doors
leaving Sadie poring over the latest 'Extra' abo
murder. When I came home I thought she had gone
for her door was closed and there was no light in th
but when I went to wake her for early Mass I fou
gone!"

"She left no note or message for you?" asked P

"No, sir. Her bed hadn't been slept in and none
things were missing except the clothes on her back,
room was strewn with feathers; she had torn op
pillow and when I looked at it close I could see wh
must have ripped it before and sewed it together
Whatever it was she had hidden in there, she mus
taken it with her."

"I should like to see her room, please." Paul rose.

"I haven't had time to straighten it yet," Mrs.
hesitated. Then crossing the kitchen, she threw open
at the end. "The feathers will fairly choke you, sir!

The room was small, with a single window openi
court, and furnished simply with a narrow iron bed,
and a combination pine bureau and wash-stand.
calico curtain suspended from a shelf bulged with t
ments hanging from pegs beneath and a cloud of f
from the torn pillow swirled with the opening of th
and settled again.

Paul's darting glance took in every detail and
finally upon the small mirror over the bureau. Fr

sides of it protruded fan-like sheafs of pictures obviously clipped from newspapers and magazines; reproduced photographs of simpering girls and buxom sirens, effeminate youths and leering satyrs in evening dress.

Paul gestured toward the improvised gallery and Mrs. Peters sighed.

"The movies!" she explained. "Sadie's just crazy about them! She would have those pictures up there. I burned the first batch I saw, but she got on one of those stubborn fits of hers and threatened to leave home if she couldn't have them. After all, it seemed harmless enough. Sadie's a good girl, sir; I've never had any trouble with her. She don't seem to care about boys, or staying out late nights. And she never was deceitful before. She just loves pretty things, like any other young girl and she'd spend her last dime for the movies."

"Do you know how much money she had with her when she went away last night?"

"Seven dollars and forty cents," Mrs. Peters responded promptly. "I thought of that the first thing. She had just ten dollars left from her wages, paid two-and-a-half for a waist, spent five cents for carfare home from Farragut Street Friday night and five cents she lent me to make change to-day for the iceman."

"What clothes are missing! What must she have worn?"

"Her best." Mrs. Peters' lips set grimly. "A black hat she'd trimmed herself with little French flowers, all colors, that poor Mrs. Hartshorne had thrown away; a blue serge suit, the new white waist, an imitation seal neck-piece and gray-topped shoes with awful high heels. She couldn't have walked further than the car line in them. I don't know if she had gloves or not, but she must have carried her wrist

bag; patent leather, it is, with a big green stone in the top. Sadie is great for style, for all she is shy and tongue-tied and kind of slow.—I can't think where she could have gone! She's only got two or three friends and I called them up from the drug-store before I 'phoned the Police. None of them had seen her."

"Did Sadie come often to see you while she was employed by Mrs. Hartshorne?"

"Every time she had an afternoon off," Mrs. Peters responded loyally. "She might go to see her friends for an hour or two, but she always came straight home to us first. There wasn't a wild notion in her mind, sir, and I brought her up strict; she don't know anything about badness or excitement or gay life except what she's seen on the screen, and she's nothing but a child at heart."

"When was the last time she came to you before Friday night?"

"The day before, sir. It was her Thursday off. She got home early, about half-past two, and trimmed that hat she must be wearing now. I went out with her to buy the white waist and she had dinner here and went back to Mrs. Hartshorne's."

"What did she talk about, do you remember? Did she seem happy in her place?"

"Well, yes, though she hates kitchen work," Mrs. Peters admitted. "I want to make a waitress of her, but this is the first time she's been out in service and she had to begin at the bottom. She didn't talk about anything much on Thursday except Mrs. Hartshorne; what beautiful clothes she wore, and how lovely she looked when she went out, and how grand she kept her hands. Sadie was sick of having her own hands in dish-water all the time. My, how she admired Mrs. Hartshorne! To hear her talk, you'd think she

was the most wonderful creature in the world! I guess that's why she took on so awful about the murder, but it don't explain her running away like this."

Paul picked up the limp pillow and examined it with no result save an incipient blizzard of down; the bureau drawers contained nothing but wearing apparel. Save for a hat or two and a box of sewing materials the shelf was bare.

"Don't worry about her any more than you can help, Mrs. Peters." Paul took up his hat from the kitchen table. "I've no doubt that we can find her for you, but it may require a few days. I don't think she has come to any harm."

"I'll be thankful beyond words if you can get her back for me safe and sound and without her uncle knowing what she's done," Mrs. Peters responded. "He loves her like he would his own, but he's a hard man in some ways and often I've had to stand between his temper and her pig-headedness. You'll let me know, sir, as soon as you've got trace of her? I shan't have a minute's peace until I'm sure nothing's happened to her, and she's coming home!"

Paul promised and took his departure.

At Headquarters, Chief Burke listened to his report without comment until it was concluded when he observed:

"Nobody could have got to her with any threat or bribe to keep her out of the way; that's a cinch if she wouldn't talk to anyone all day, not even the neighbors. Maybe she was afraid to talk to them; afraid she'd tell how much she knew. There might have been something in that newspaper she was reading when her aunt went out that scared her into running away. But she won't get far on French heels and seven dollars!"

"I don't know," Paul demurred. "She's long on determination and she has a fixed idea in her head. Her disappearance isn't worrying me any; I fancy I could lay my

hands on her to-morrow, but I want to give her a little more rope and await developments."

"You could, could you?" The Chief snorted. "I'd like to know where you get that stuff? You'll be telling me next that her running away had nothing to do with the murder!"

"Something like that," grinned Paul.

"Well, you'll find yourself wrong for once, my boy!" The Chief banged his desk resoundingly. "What did she have hidden in the pillow? She was envious of Mrs. Hartshorne, even to her hands, and starved for the kind of excitement she had seen in the movies. She got home early Thursday night and she might easily have let into the house somebody who fooled her with some silly romantic story or bribed her with money for pretty clothes. You can take it from me, Paul, there was remorse if not actual guilt in that cry to her aunt: 'If I'd only known!' Find her, and you'll get your first real line on who killed Mrs. Hartshorne?"

Chapter XII.

AN UNSEEN WITNESS.

PAUL spent the rest of the day in routine work; "laying wires" as he would have expressed it. He arranged for a dragnet to be thrown out for the runaway kitchenmaid, but stipulated that if found she was not to be apprehended until he had been notified. The afternoon was occupied by a further and more exhaustive search of the Farragut Street house, and early evening found him again in his own rooms, going over for the hundredth time the tangled threads of the problem which he held in his hands.

As in the early morning the telephone bell summoned him once more, but this time a clear, girlish voice, vibrant with scarcely controlled excitement, came to him over the wire.

"Is that you, Mr. Harvey? This is Rose Adare. I think I've found what you are looking for; someone who saw Mrs. Hartshorne enter her house that night! It's a young woman and she's here in my home, willing and glad to talk to you if you can come right away." She added in a lower, hurried tone: "Be quick, Mr. Harvey! I've had an awful time with her and she may change her mind."

"What is your address?" he asked, hastily. "I'll be there as soon as a taxi can bring me."

"Fifty-six Maple Terrace," she responded. "The subway will get you here quickest."

He adopted her suggestion and twenty minutes later stood in the vestibule of number fifty-six, one of the long row of attractive brick and stone apartment houses which composed the Terrace. When his name was announced at the switchboard he was requested to come up immediately, and Rose Adare herself awaited him at the door of her apartment.

"Please go right into the drawing-room, Mr. Harvey. I live here with an old friend of my mother, but she is out now and we can have a private interview."

She ushered him into a dainty front-room, draped in subdued colors and furnished with a few pieces of good old mahogany. A figure in a showy gown and wide sweeping hat rose from an armchair as he entered and Paul found himself confronting a handsome, sullen-eyed girl, with a rebellious twist to her full, red lips and an air half of depreciation, half defiance.

"Let me present my friend Mr. Harvey," began Rose. "This is Miss Daisy Bayne."

"How do you do?" the girl said stiffly. "I suppose this is a game that you two have put up on me, but I don't care; I'm glad enough to tell you what I saw if you won't let it go any farther and hurt me in my work. I'd never get another case if the doctors found out I'd been negligent in the last one, with the Fraser boy."

"'The Fraser boy'?" Paul repeated eagerly.

She nodded.

"I'm a trained nurse. I was on night duty at the Frasers, number one-thirty-eight Farragut Street, on Thursday evening."

Paul motioned toward her chair and drew up another for himself. His brown eyes shone, but his voice was perfunctorily cool.

"Yes? How long had you been on the case, Miss Bayne?"

"Since Tuesday night, alternating with the day nurse. The little boy—he's six years old—has a touch of diphtheria. I went on at seven o'clock Thursday, relieving Miss Wray. Donald, my patient, was restless and feverish the first part of the evening but by midnight his temperature fell and he went off into such a deep, natural sleep that I was sure the turning point had been reached. The family had given up the whole second floor to us and the sick-room was at the back; the front-room looking out on Farragut Street was a sort of library and Miss Wray and I took turns sleeping there on a couch.

"I stayed right beside Donald and never took my eyes off him for an hour or more, but he didn't stir. His forehead was damp and he was breathing easily and the relief from the strain was beginning to make me drowsy. I thought that a breath of the cool night air and a sight of the street would wake me up and it didn't seem any harm to leave him for just a minute, though of course it was against my orders.

"I stole into the library where Miss Wray was snoring on the couch and tiptoed over to the open window. The lights were all out in the houses across the street and only the street lamps were burning, but there was one directly opposite, between a hundred-and-thirty-seven, and nine. I only meant to stay for a minute, but the air was so clean and refreshing that I dropped on my knees by the window-sill and I guess—I am afraid—that I fell asleep."

She faltered over the admission and paused, but Paul urged her on.

"What awakened you, Miss Bayne?"

"The sound of a motorcar in the street. It was a big limousine and it drew up before number one-thirty-nine,

Mrs. Hartshorne's house. I watched because I had read a lot about her in the society columns of the newspapers and I wanted to catch a glimpse of her.

"The chauffeur shut off his engine and switched out his lights. That was the first thing that struck me as being funny, but the light from the street lamp was almost bright enough to read by. The chauffeur climbed down and disappeared in the shadow on the other side of the door and I thought he was lame—" she caught herself up, flushing with momentary embarrassment as she remembered the slight limp with which Paul had entered, but he smiled pleasantly.

"Go on, please, Miss Bayne. It wasn't I, I assure you."

"Oh, I know that!" She bit her lip. "It seemed to me that whoever was in that car, took a long time to get out of it. But when they moved beyond the shadow and up the steps of the house in the circle of light I could understand why. There were three of them, a man and two women; one woman was in the middle and they were holding her up, almost carrying her to the door. I thought she must be sick or—or intoxicated, for her body sagged drunkenly and the other woman and the man had all they could do to get her into the vestibule. They didn't ring and must have let themselves in with a key, though not a light sprang up in the house except just a tiny spark, like a match flame, before the front door closed behind them."

"Was it the chauffeur who helped to carry the woman in?" asked Paul.

"No. The man was tall and straight and wore a long ulster and a soft felt hat pulled low. The women were bareheaded and in opera coats; I couldn't tell the color, but the one the sick woman wore was trimmed with white fur—ermine, I think—and the other's was all dark.

"The chauffeur started his engine and the car moved off, without lights, to a spot three or four doors down the street. Then he shut off the engine again and waited, and I waited, too. I know it was inexcusable but I forgot all about my patient and where I was in my interest in what was happening over the way. It seemed like half an hour, though I suppose it couldn't have been more than a few minutes, before the door opened again and the man came out with the woman in the dark cloak. This time I made sure that they must all have been drinking too much, for this woman began to stagger now as she came down the steps. I've had more than one alcoholic case among society women, and I wasn't surprised. She reeled and caught at the balustrade to save herself from collapse, but the man was right at her side and the chauffeur ran forward, too, to help; I saw then that he was very lame."

"In which leg?"

"The left, I think. They wanted to assist the woman, but she pulled herself together and walked to the car steadily enough. Then they all got in and drove off. I thought it was awfully queer, leaving the other woman like that without a light showing to prove that a servant or someone had been awakened to take care of her. I would have aroused Miss Wray and told her about it, but she is a regular martinet for discipline and I was afraid she would scold because I had left my patient, perhaps even report me to the doctor. I had to wake her up anyway, as it happened, and you can believe I didn't say anything about what I'd seen, because when I went back to the sick-room I found Donald black in the face and almost strangling! We had a hard time with him and although she didn't know I had left him, Miss Wray chose to put all the blame on me. When the danger point was past we had an argument about it and I

told the doctor he would have to put someone else on the case with Miss Wray; I'd had enough of her tyranny!"

"You gave up the case?" Paul asked. "When did you leave the Fraser house?"

"About noon on Friday. I was so angry that I had almost forgotten what I had seen in the night. But just as I let myself out of the house a young woman and a policeman rushed up the steps of number one-thirty-nine across the way and disappeared inside. I remembered then what I'd seen and I knew something horrible must have happened, but I didn't dare linger about for fear I would be questioned. I hurried back to the boarding house where I live between cases, and waited for the evening papers, but before they came out there was an 'Extra' and I was shocked! I hadn't dreamed, even when I saw the policeman, that it could have been murder!

"I didn't know what to do then; I felt as if I ought to come forward and tell what I had seen but I was afraid I would get in the papers and then the doctor would know I had been to blame for Donald's relapse—well, not really to blame," she corrected herself hastily, "but that I had been careless with him and disobeyed orders. I wouldn't be trusted on another case if he knew, and I have my mother to support in the country, so you can see what a position I was in!

"The murder puzzled me, too, for none of the papers mentioned the possibility of Mrs. Hartshorne having come home ill or under the influence of alcohol and I was positive there had been no pistol shot while those other people were in the house or even after they had driven away. I thought of nothing else for hours until the truth finally came to me."

She stopped with a shudder and Paul leaned toward her.

"You mean——?"

"That it must have been her dead body which they carried into the house between them!"

Rose Adare, who was seated a little apart, uttered a low exclamation; but Paul merely nodded.

"And when you came to that conclusion, did you still hesitate to tell what you knew?"

"Yes." Miss Bayne hung her head for a moment and then looked up defiantly. "It wouldn't have done any good to Mrs. Hartshorne for me to have come forward, and I had to think of myself! It worried me, though, so that I wasn't fit for anything; another doctor wanted me on a case yesterday, but I was so nervous and upset that I couldn't take it. Then this morning Miss Adare, here, came to see me on a business proposition and said Dr. Davis had spoken of me to her in connection with it. I didn't recognize her as the young woman who had rushed with the policeman into the Hartshorne house and I believed her."

She spoke in an injured tone and Paul glanced at Rose, but the latter was gazing demurely down at her folded hands.

"Dr. Davis was the physician in charge of the Fraser case and I was glad he had recommended me because that showed he didn't hold me responsible for little Donald's relapse, and the business proposition sounded feasible enough," Miss Bayne continued. "We talked it over and Miss Adare invited me to lunch and then we took a long walk and decided to have dinner together. Nothing was said about the murder at first, but speaking of Dr. Davis I mentioned the Fraser case and Miss Adare asked where they lived. When I told her 'on Farragut Street' it seemed to bring up the Hartshorne affair quite naturally and before

I knew it I was telling her everything. She brought me here and persuaded me that I ought to tell you, too, promising me faithfully that you wouldn't get me into any trouble over it. You won't, will you Mr. Harvey? I'll never be careless on another case, and I've told you this of my own free will."

"You won't get in any trouble, I promise you, Miss Bayne," Paul reassured her. "Now, to go back to that night. You say that your patient fell asleep about midnight and that you watched over him for an hour or more before going to the library. Can you fix the time more definitely than that?"

"It was after half-past one, because I looked at him then and he was still fast asleep. It was the time for his medicine but Dr. Davis had instructed me not to disturb Donald unless he were awake and restless." She paused. "I went into the library a few minutes later, and I couldn't have slept very long there at the window before the sound of the motor car aroused me, because when it had driven away again, I went back to the sick-room to find Donald choking and called Miss Wray. It was only a quarter of three; she put it down on the chart. I should say that car drove up to Mrs. Hartshorne's door between twenty minutes after and half-past two."

"Could you tell the color of the car body?"

"No, only that it was very dark. It must have been a high-powered, expensive car, though, for the hood was extra long and it looked massive, looming up there under the light from the street lamp."

"You said that the woman who rode away in it was bareheaded and had on a long, dark cloak. Did you catch a glimpse of her face under the lamp? Do you think you would know her again?"

Miss Bayne recoiled.

"Mercy, no!" she gasped. "She was tall and graceful, but you couldn't tell whether she was stout or thin muffled up in that loose cloak. And I never once saw her face, it was always in shadow. Her hair seemed dark under the lamp, but I couldn't be sure. I've told you everything about it that I remember and could swear to, Mr. Harvey! May I go now? It's late and I—I'm too nervous to talk about it any more."

"Yes, I think I have enough information now to work on." Paul rose and held out his hand. "This would have been of inestimable benefit to me had you come forward sooner, but thank you for telling me now, at any rate; you have cleared up one or two obscure points very nicely for me, Miss Bayne."

The young woman shook his hand, bowed coldly to Rose Adare and departed. When the emphatic thud of the street door reached their ears, Paul turned with a smile of warm congratulation to his hostess.

"May I ask what business proposition you suggested to that young person, and what stroke of positive genius put you on her trail?"

Rose laughed heartily.

"I wanted her to start a rest cure with me; a sort of private sanitarium. She to treat the sick—Heaven help them!—and I to manage the finances." Then her face grew grave. "I began thinking after I left you yesterday morning, Mr. Harvey. I was wondering who on that street would be likely to have been up during the night and all of a sudden I remembered that when I first saw Mrs. Hartshorne's body and ran out in the street to find a policeman, there was a doctor's landaulet in front of the house opposite. It was still there when I looked out of the drawing

room window while I waited for you and Chief Burke to send for me nearly two hours later. I thought somebody must have been very ill over there to keep a doctor that long, and it struck me that if anyone in all that street had been awake and stirring when Mrs. Hartshorne came home, it would be someone in that house.

"After I left Mrs. Cowles yesterday I walked through Farragut Street. The landaulet was there again and I—I got into conversation with the chauffeur." Miss Adare had the grace to blush most becomingly. "I found out the doctor's name and office hours and late yesterday afternoon I went to pay a professional call on him. I—I had a queer kind of a pain which he couldn't diagnose; but he was most helpful in other ways. I asked how the little Fraser boy was, saying I knew the family, and he spoke of the relapse and the night nurse leaving. He mentioned her name and just on an off chance I looked her up in the nurses' directory and went to see her this morning. The minute I began talking to her and saw how she shied away from any mention of Farragut Street I realized that I was on the right track, and I stuck to her until she broke down and told me her story."

"Miss Adare," Paul shook her hand solemnly, "I can't express my personal gratitude to you, but I can tell you how much I admire what you have done! It was masterly! Chief Burke has no one on his staff who could have equalled it! You have beaten me at my own game."

"Nonsense!" She flushed again, rosily. "I had a—a hunch, that's all; it probably wouldn't happen again in a thousand years. But I don't believe that girl's story is going to be such a lot of help to you as I thought it would, Mr. Harvey. You knew some of it before, didn't you? You weren't surprised a bit when she said it was poor Mrs.

Hartshorne's dead body that had been brought to the house!"

"No," Paul responded gravely. "I knew from my first examination of the body that Mrs. Hartshorne had not been killed in her own home. But Miss Bayne's testimony as to the hour and method of returning the body and the description of those who accomplished it is of the utmost importance."

"Still," Rose mused, "two men and a woman and a limousine; there's nothing very definite about that, is there? I wish to goodness I'd been in that window instead of Miss Bayne! Where do you suppose they killed poor Mrs. Hartshorne? Where could she have been those three hours after she left the Ledyard dance, and what possessed her to slip away like that?"

"I'm afraid we're not going to like the answers to that riddle when we learn them, Miss Adare." Then Paul's tone lightened. "You will be adding another to your list of professional accomplishments, now; that of detective. My plain-clothes brethren will have to look to their laurels."

"I wish I could! I mean," she amended, "I wish I could do something more in this case. If any little point comes up that you think I could verify for you, or if there's any snooping to be done where I'd stand a better show than a man, will you let me know?"

"I will, indeed!" Paul assented heartily. "By the way, you don't happen to be going to the funeral to-morrow afternoon, do you?"

"I don't happen to be staying away, if there's breath in my body!" retorted Rose, promptly. "There's little enough I can do to show respect to the woman who's been kind to me! I suppose the crowd that made so much of her so short a time since will avoid it like the plague. I'm curious to see if she had even one real friend among them."

"I wish you'd be more curious still," Paul suggested. "Go early, get a seat about the center of the church on the main aisle, if you can, and watch the people; leave before the end of the service and wait in the vestibule to see them come out. Not only those you recognize, but the strangers. Don't let anything escape you. You can report to me later, if you will. Will you do this?"

"Surely!" Her eyes glowed. "Leave it to me, Mr. Harvey! If there's a guilty conscience in the crowd and I don't spot it I'll stick to being a secretary for the rest of my days. But you don't think those people who brought the body home would venture there, do you?"

"No," responded Paul as he shook hands once more. "I think they will find themselves otherwise engaged to-morrow."

Chapter XIII.

WHERE DEATH LURKED.

THE inquest on Monday morning was not a protracted one and resulted in the familiar non-committal verdict of murder by a person or persons unknown. Paul did not produce the later evidence which he had obtained from the reluctant Miss Bayne, nor had he as yet taken Chief Burke into his confidence. As he sat in the latter's office in the early afternoon the vials of official discontent and chagrin were poured out before him.

"It's not that I blame you, Paul," the Chief assured him gloomily. "But that inquest was the biggest fizzle in the history of the Department! Three days since the body was discovered and we have done no more than when we first stood looking down on it! Wait till you hear the holler the evening papers make about it! I tell you we've got to do something, and do it quick."

Paul nodded.

"I know," he assented patiently. "Has any report come in yet on that missing girl, Sadie Mullen?"

"None whatever," the Chief responded with emphasis. "You're on the wrong track about her, my boy. She's the only one who holds the key to the situation—and we've let her slip through our fingers! We don't care how Mrs. Hartshorne left the Ledyard house or when; what we want to know is who got into her own house and killed her. And you won't find that out with the line of investigation you've been following."

"Maybe not," Paul admitted, with his eyes on the clock. "I'm expecting a young lady to call, Chief. I took the liberty of telephoning to her in your name and I'd like to have you hear what she has to say. After that, if you like, I'll drop the method I've been working on and take my orders from you, sir. She is late—no, she's coming now. Don't expect too much, it is only one of the society crowd Mrs. Hartshorne traveled with, but I think she can corroborate a certain theory of mine."

As he spoke the door opened and a slender figure stood haughtily on the threshold. Clad in purple velvet with a glowing cluster of violets against her sables, and a toque of the same rich hue upon her auburn hair, she looked almost regal as she stood silently regarding them with a calm, disdainful gaze.

"Good afternoon, Miss Ledyard," said Paul suavely. "Allow me to present Chief Burke. The Chief is anxious to learn what you know of last Thursday night's event."

Ignoring him, she bowed coldly to the stout figure which had arisen affably from behind the desk.

"I am at a loss to understand your message, Mr. Burke." Her tones were even and metallic. "We—my father and all of us—have done all in our power to convince your special investigator that we know absolutely nothing of the tragedy, but he has persisted in annoying us. I have come as you requested, but I must beg you to be brief; I have an engagement."

"Sit here, please, Miss Ledyard." The Chief gallantly rolled forward a huge leather armchair.

With an expression of the uttermost boredom she seated herself and loosened the furs about her throat.

"I have already told Mr. Harvey—" she began, but the younger man interrupted her.

"It is what you have not told me that we wish to hear now," he said with quiet firmness. "Your own movements during the evening, for instance."

Miss Ledyard raised her eyebrows.

"I assisted my mother to make the affair a success. I helped her receive and then danced, like the rest. Really, Mr. Harvey——"

"You danced until the supper hour?"

"Certainly; and afterward, until the affair broke up at two o'clock."

"Miss Ledyard, did you enter the conservatory before supper?" He eyed her steadily.

"I don't know." The supercilious look was gone now, but a mask had dropped over her stiffened features. "I don't remember."

"Please try to think, Miss Ledyard. I am sure you have not quite forgotten." His tone was fraught with deep significance, but she returned his gaze in bland impassivity.

"Mr. Harvey, it is impossible for me to recall such a detail. I do not know that I entered the conservatory at all that night——"

She paused, but not with any conscious effort; it was rather that her voice died away in her closing throat as if an iron hand had clutched her. The Chief bent forward so suddenly that his swivel chair squeaked a protest. Paul had taken from his coat pocket a paper packet. Unfolding it, he disclosed a fragment of a woman's scarf. It was a delicate, opalescent, silky thing of palest sea-green with a silvery tinge like foam. Its shimmering length was stained with great blotches of rusty brown where the fabric had dulled and stiffened.

An odd, tremulous sigh floated out upon the tense air, but there was silence until Paul asked:

"Do you recognize this, Miss Ledyard?"

"No." Her tone was still even, but hushed as though she were waiting.

"Is this not a portion of a scarf which belonged to you?"

"No. I have never——"

"Miss Ledyard, some of your servants are faithful to you, loyal even to the extent of abetting a felony, but you made a mistake on Saturday night when you dismissed Louise, your maid, for her disobedience in leaving the cloak-room where she was stationed during the dance, and permitted her to remove this damaging bit of evidence. She positively identifies this scarf as yours and even told me the name of the shop where it was purchased."

"You have just supplied the motive, yourself, for such a statement from her. The word of a discharged servant—?" she shrugged. "I was about to add, when you interrupted me, that I had never seen the scarf—if that is what it is—before, in my life."

"Nevertheless it was found stuffed behind the radiator in your boudoir. An effort had been made to burn it, presumably in your bathtub, for the odor and smoke were remarked upon by your mother when she entered your apartment later. You can see where the end has been partially consumed." Paul's voice was stern. "There can be no question as to these stains, Miss Ledyard. Would you care to examine it?" He held it out to her, but she recoiled.

"Certainly not! What has it to do with me? If you believe a servant's lies——"

"I have another witness. When you go upon such a grim, nocturnal errand, Miss Ledyard, you should not choose a chauffeur who is unfortunate enough—like myself—as to possess an infirmity which renders him distinctive, even under the rays of a street lamp.

"What do you mean?"

Her voice was hoarse and shaken now, but her small head was proudly erect.

"I mean that you, your butler Hickson and his son William, your chauffeur, conveyed the body of Mrs. Hartshorne for myour home to hers, and placed it where it was later discovered!" Paul advanced slowly, step by step, as he hurled his indictment at her. His slender figure seemed to tower over her. "I mean that from before midnight until after two o'clock in the morning, while the jazz band brayed and you supped and danced, the body of the murdered woman lay where it had fallen, among the orchids in the conservatory which had been locked by your orders! I mean that you, Beatrice Ledyard, killed the woman who had supplanted you——"

"A-ah!" The snarling scream which tore its way from her distorted lips was more like that of some wild beast than human, and like a tigress she crouched, her tawny eyes blazing. "Stop! I can't bear it! I shall go mad, mad!"

Then all at once her tense form relaxed and she crumpled in her chair with a high, thin, wailing cry which broke into tearing sobs.

The Chief, with lax jaw and protruding eyes, was staring at her like one in a trance. Paul waited until the storm had spent itself before he spoke again.

"I can go into details, if you like; trace step by step and hour by hour all that you did——"

"For God's sake, no!" She threw up her slender hands as if to ward off a blow. "I'll tell you myself! It's all true, except the charge that I killed her! I did not; she must have killed herself! How you discovered the rest I do not know, for Hickson would never have betrayed me. We thought we had arranged it all so carefully, safeguarded it

from any possible discovery. I had no animosity toward Mrs. Hartshorne; I had given her no thought save to doubt the wisdom of our sanction of her with no knowledge of her antecedents.

"I saw her enter with the Gaylors on Thursday night, and go upstairs to leave her cloak. When she came down I nodded to her as I told you, and went on dancing. I didn't even think of her again, I swear it! More than an hour later—it must have been about a quarter to twelve—I slipped into the conservatory alone. I was warm and fatigued and the lights and noise of that jazz band had made me dizzy; I wanted a moment's respite in the cool, comparatively fresher air. I started toward a bench—when all at once I saw her lying there among the orchids, her pistol clutched in her hand and a hideous stain spreading on her breast!

"I screamed, I think, but the blare of the orchestra drowned my voice. I could feel myself sway and everything began to whirl before me, when with a final blast the music ceased. I pulled myself together, somehow, and turning ran to the door leading to the ball-room with only one thought in my mind; to keep anyone from entering until I had decided what to do."

"If you are telling the truth, Miss Ledyard," Paul interposed swiftly, "why should you have hesitated? Why did you not give the alarm at once and summon aid?"

"And have all the world know that this woman who had come from nowhere and foisted herself upon us had committed suicide in our home? Oh, can't you understand?" The girl wrung her hands. "The notoriety, the disgrace of it! To have us all dragged through the mire of a police investigation, our names blazoned on the front page of every scandal-mongering journal, our private af-

fairs discussed on every street corner! It would have ruined my father, killed my mother! People in our station of life cannot afford a breath of that sort of scandal, it is fatal! We would go to any length to stamp it out!"

Paul shook his head slowly as though her explanation failed to convince him, but he forbore to pursue the argument.

"What did you do when you reached the door?"

"I found that instead of coming toward the conservatory everyone was trooping out to the supper-room. Hickson was hovering about in the hall by the ball-room door and I caught his eye and beckoned. When he came I cautioned him to silence and showed him the body. We decided quickly what must be done. I was to go in to supper and keep things going until the dance was over, while Hickson would lock the conservatory door—the key was there, in the lock—and go up to Louise for Mrs. Hartshorne's cloak, saying she had sent him, if necessary. Then, should her absence be remarked upon, we could say that she had gone home.

"I don't know how I got through the nightmare of those two hours! I was on the verge of collapse. I wanted to shriek aloud, to tell everyone of that terrible thing that was lying there in the conservatory. But I controlled myself and the night wore on somehow until the end. Hickson had slipped out right after supper, told William, and warned him to be ready with the car. After all the guests had gone I said goodnight to my mother, went to my room and, dismissing Louise for the night, put on a long, dark cloak and wrapped that scarf—the first which came to my hand—about my head. When the lights were all out except one tiny glimmer in the hall I stole downstairs again and found Hickson waiting for me.

"He tried to persuade me not to go, saying that he and William could manage to get the body back to her home and leave it in the vestibule, for that was what we had planned. I was determined to see it through, however; I could not have endured the suspense until his return, and I was afraid that despite his loyalty he might bungle. He got her cloak from where he had hidden it in the closet beneath the stairs, and together we entered the conservatory."

Her voice had faltered and now a shudder swept her from head to foot, but she gripped the arms of her chair and forced herself to go on:

"The—the blood upon her breast had congealed, but it was not dry; and when Hickson started to wrap her cloak about her, something jingled in a little pocket in the lining. It was her latchkey. When we realized from that that her household would all be asleep a new idea came to us; to take her up to her bed-room and make it appear that she had committed suicide there. Then I remembered the blood! If the slightest trace of it smirched her cloak it would be discovered that she had been brought there wounded, at least. I tore the scarf from my head and wadded it across her breast.

"We lifted her sagging body between us and got her out to the car, but it was ghastly! I shall never forget that fearful ride, short as it was, with that limp weight lolling and slumping from side to side! My brain reels when I think of it—and I can think of nothing else! It will remain with me always, like a phase of hideous, remembered delirium!

"Hickson had pocketed her pistol and he carried, too, a tiny electric torch. We reached the house at last and walked the body up the steps between us. In the vestibule Hickson held it braced against the wall while I unlocked the door.

It was dark and absolutely silent. No one stirred as we dragged her up through the sleeping house and laid her upon the floor of her bed-room. Hickson threw her cloak over a chair as if she herself might have dropped it there, and closed her fingers about the pistol while I placed her latchkey upon the dresser. Then I made the mistake which led you all so quickly to conclude that it was murder and not suicide; I arranged her skirts about her feet, closed those terrible eyes that were staring at us so relentlessly, and put her empty hand up over the wound on her breast. The scarf I rolled up with the stains inside and carried it away.

"There was still no sound in the house, but Hickson closed the bedroom door and locked it so that if Mrs. Hartshorne's maid should awaken and come down and knock, she would think her mistress was asleep and the alarm would not be given immediately. The street was deserted and I was sure no one had seen us; we rushed home as fast as we dared and Hickson gave me the key of Mrs. Hartshorne's door. I slipped into the house and up to my own room at last, and just as I entered the clock struck three! We'd been gone less than an hour, but it seemed ages and ages to me!

"The rest you seem to know, Mr. Harvey. Only that scarf was on my mind, and I racked my brains as to how to dispose of it. Had it been winter and an open wood fire blazing on the hearth my problem would have been solved, but I decided to burn it anyway—in the bathtub as you surmised. I could not nerve myself to do it that night, however, for I was almost prostrated, and the next morning Mrs. Cowles, who had remained as a house guest over night, came in and talked, and then my mother. I was compelled to drag myself down to lunch for fear of comment. Almost immediately after there came the news of what was called

the 'murder'. It was late afternoon before I dared attempt to burn the scarf. I had to stop before it was done, for the odor and smoke sickened me and I was afraid it would steal out into the rest of the house and arouse questions I could not very well answer. I thrust it again behind the radiator where I had hidden it at first and could not even bring myself to look at it again until yesterday morning. Then I discovered that it was gone."

"And that is all, Miss Ledyard?" Paul asked searchingly. "You have no knowledge of who killed Mrs. Hartshorne?"

"She killed herself." With the end of her confession the inscrutable mask seemed to have descended again upon the girl's face, blotting out the emotions which had contorted it. Her eyes dulled like those of a basilisk. "There cannot be any question about that. When I first came upon her in the conservatory the pistol was clutched in her hand. It has been identified as hers. One shot had been fired from it and the papers have announced that the bullet found at the autopsy fitted it. If I had not in a moment of silly weakness tried to compose the body no one would have doubted the truth."

"No one does doubt it!" The Chief found his voice. "The woman was murdered! No matter where the body might have been found, or under what circumstances, you couldn't have faked a suicide bluff that would get by! Mrs. Hartshorne never fired that shot herself."

"But she must have done so!" the girl cried wildly. "There was no 'fake', as you call it, Mr. Burke! I tell you I saw her with the pistol in her hand and the wound still warm and bleeding!"

"You didn't see any powder marks on it, did you?" the Chief asked.

"Powder marks?" she repeated vaguely.

"Neither did we, and if the pistol had been held within arm's length of her the whole front of her waist around the wound would have been speckled with powder. That shot was fired from a distance of anywhere between ten and forty feet away, Miss Ledyard. When you found her was the pistol in her right or left hand?"

"Her right." The reply came in a mere toneless whisper.

"You could swear to that?"

She nodded.

"Well, there's your answer." The Chief sat back in his chair. "That bullet entered Mrs. Hartshorne's breast from the *left* and made a slanting wound. It is no use trying to deceive us any longer, Miss Ledyard. We don't know how her pistol came into your possession or what passed between you, but your motive——"

"Stop!" She had risen, and her voice rang out clearly. "I did not kill Mrs. Hartshorne! I am not given to light oaths but as God is above to judge me, I am innocent of her death!"

"Then who is guilty?" The Chief rose also and his huge form bent toward her over the desk. "Miss Ledyard, who fired that shot?"

"I don't know!" she faltered, and in her eyes a look of terror was born. "If she did not kill herself, if she really was murdered, I know no more of it than you!"

Chapter XIV.

MISS ADARE GOSSIPS.

"I TAKE it all back, Paul!" The Chief held out his hand. "I ought to have remembered from your other cases that you make the most headway when you seem to be lying down on the job. That scarf did the trick. How did you get hold of it?"

Paul laughed.

"The girl, Louise, brought it to me herself this morning; that was pure luck, but it was superfluous evidence as far as I was concerned, although it served as a good dramatic touch to force Miss Ledyard to speak. Don't forget that I had a witness to that strange homecoming."

He told of what the trained nurse had seen from the house across the street, but the Chief shook his head.

"Still I can't see what you got out of that to connect Miss Ledyard with the woman in the car," he commented. "That was a pretty nervy accusation of yours, all right!"

"Not with the data I already had," protested Paul. "In the first place, Chief, I knew from my examination of that room that Mrs. Hartshorne had not been killed there. Besides the arrangement of the body and the missing cartridge shell there was one small but conclusive point you overlooked; a faint, scarcely visible smear of blood upon the lining of the cloak which lay across the chair. If you had been interested in psychology, too, you would have seen the significance of the incongruity between the ruthlessness

of the murder itself and the pity—call it sentimentality, if you like—displayed in the arrangement of the body. I was sure that a woman had a hand in that.

"I learned subsequently that Miss Ledyard had started the ball of gossip rolling about Mrs. Hartshorne's antecedents, and the motive for her spite; she was in love with Cornelius Swarthmore, who had practically jilted her for Mrs. Hartshorne. You had a good look at her this afternoon, Chief; you heard how she carried out a scheme that a weaker, more gentle character would have shrunk from. That girl is strong, but her passions are stronger. She would be quite capable in a jealous mania of killing anyone who stood in her way."

"Then why on earth did you let her go?" demanded the Chief. "Why did you object to her immediate arrest?"

"Because I think she would be equally capable of a supreme sacrifice if her affections prompted it; not to the extent of relinquishing the man she loved to a victorious rival, but of protecting that man at any risk to herself from the consequences of an act she thought was his. She is quite capable of having killed Mrs. Hartshone; but did she? It would hold the Department up to more than ridicule if we placed the daughter of one of our foremost families under arrest on a false charge. I admit her explanation of why she concealed and removed the body was inadequate——"

"Inadequate?" The Chief caught him up on the word. "It was as full of holes as a sieve!"

"But the motive for her act would be equally comprehensible whether she herself were guilty or suspected the identity of the murderer and sought to shield him," Paul retorted. "However, I did not surmise that the crime had been committed there until Saturday, when I returned for

the second interview. I saw then that both Miss Ledyard and the butler were keeping something back, and that an understanding of some sort existed between them. When I mentioned Louise's remark that Mrs. Cowles had complained of the locking of the conservatory door from midnight on, they exchanged a most significant, warning glance and both promptly denied the assertion. The fact that Mrs. Hartshorne's cloak had mysteriously disappeared at the same hour but that her departure was seen by no one, the crushed orchid bed—all aroused my suspicions; but it remained for Hickson to add the final link in the chain.

"When he assured me, quite gratuitously, of the patriotism of his family he said that his son William, the Ledyards' chauffeur, had suffered a shattered knee at Ypres. Miss Bayne's description of the lame chauffeur who drove the car in which the dead woman was brought to her home was too conclusive to be a mere coincidence. That scarf in the hands of a vengeful maid was only corroborative evidence, as you see."

"It was great work, Paul, but don't spring a surprise like that on me again!" The Chief grinned sheepishly. "You told me not to expect too much from Miss Ledyard's statement! Good Lord, if I'd expected half of what was coming I would never have kicked about the lack of progress at the inquest. The press can yell its fool head off now, and welcome! Just wait till we spring this on them!"

"We've got to have something tangible to spring first," Paul reminded him. "Of course, we can hold Miss Ledyard, the butler and the chauffeur as accessories after the fact, but that doesn't get us anywhere."

"Well, what do you propose to do about it?" asked the Chief. "You have no basis yet for a charge against Swarthmore——"

"There's another woman in this case who hasn't told all she knows," Paul remarked. "She won't, either, except of her own free will. I tell you, Chief, we've gone a step or two in the right direction, but we're not out of the woods yet."

When he reached his rooms he found Rose Adare patiently waiting outside.

"I 'phoned right after the funeral, but no one answered, so I came straight here," she announced. "I won't have much time to talk, for I've got an appointment to attend to some correspondence for Mrs. Cowles. I thought that perhaps you could walk over there with me——?"

"Indeed I will!" he assented heartily. "Did anything occur at the funeral which struck you as being significant?"

"Well, there was the usual mob of morbid sight-seers; the police had to hold them back from fairly storming the church, early as it was." Rose fell into step beside him and went on. "I got in, though, and managed to sit where you told me. Jenny was there, and the cook, and I thought once that I caught a glimpse of that kitchenmaid, Sadie, but I must have been mistaken."

"Why?" asked Paul.

"Because she never could have got hold of the clothes the girl that I saw had on. They were loud enough to wake the dead, but expensive! The paradise on her hat alone was worth fifty dollars if it cost a cent; and real white fox doesn't grow on trees! There wasn't one of those who called themselves Mrs. Hartshorne's friends in the whole church, that I could see, at least none that I recognized, but something funny did happen; odd, I mean.

"The coffin was down the center aisle, in front of the altar, with a few big set-looking floral pieces grouped around it. The service had started and the choir was chanting

when an old man tottered down the aisle past me toward the altar. He looked almost seventy, tall and stooping, with scant white hair and the palest face I ever saw; like wax, and deeply lined. I shouldn't have noticed him particularly but for the way his watery eyes were fixed on the coffin with a stare as if he were walking in his sleep. He kept right on until he stood beside the casket and laid his trembling old hand on it. An usher came from behind me and led him back and he looked rather bewildered.

Dr. Perrine was eloquent in her praise, but you could see he wasn't any too pleased to be conducting the service. I'll wager he was shaking in his boots to think of what the woman he was eulogizing might turn out to have been or done before ever she set foot in his aristrocratic parish. I fancy others were thinking the same thing, for once somebody in the pew just behind me laughed right out; not loudly but a sort of scornful, derisive chuckle.

"I looked around quickly to see who it could have been. There were two fat women in the pew, an old man with his mouth open and his hand cupped behind his ear, a girl scribbling away in a note book, an old lady sniffing and eating peppermints, a dark, thin, young man with a smooth and face and bold black eyes. He gave me a sharp look and I turned around again; but it was easy to see they were all just there from curiosity.

"After the service was over I went out and waited in the vestibule as you told me to do. Jenny and the cook came out together, talking so busily they never noticed me, and though I stood there until everybody had gone I didn't see a thing more that would have interested you, Mr. Harvey. The people all seemed solemn, but there wasn't one who looked as if that death meant anything to them, one way or the other."

"It was good of you to have followed my instructions so exactly, Miss Adare." Paul paused and glanced at her. "I wonder if you would be willing to help me still further? There is something that only you can accomplish for me—"

"Oh, what is it?" She halted and turned sparkling eyes upon him. "I'll do anything in the world that I can!"

"Don't promise rashly," he warned. "What if I should ask you to renounce for the time being the principle on which you have built up your business; to carry, not to seek information, and to do it blindly without even knowing why? Would you be willing to do that in order to help me get at the truth?"

She eyed him uneasily. "Just what is it you want me to do, Mr. Harvey?"

"Gossip!" he replied briefly. "I want you to gossip most outrageously; to carry such a tale as will make the hair of your client stand on end! I cannot tell you my reasons, but it is vitally important that a certain bit of news should reach Mrs. Cowles without delay. You would not be telling any absolute falsehood, for the story you would repeat has a solid basis of fact. It will not make any trouble for you if Mrs. Cowles is discreet, and I think I can promise that she will be; she will have the best of reasons for not permitting what you tell her to go any farther. Will you do this. Miss Adare?"

She drew a deep breath.

"It's asking a good deal, Mr. Harvey, for I vowed that I'd never let a tattling word pass my lips in business, but if it really is going to help you find the murderer of Mrs. Hartshorne, I'll chance it. What is it that you wish me to tell Mrs. Cowles?"

"Well, for a start, you might reveal certain of your own private affairs. You have made a conquest; a young man

is crazy about you, and for all he thinks he is clever, you can wind him around your little finger and make him tell you everything he knows." Paul smiled. "That young man is myself."

"What-t!" She flushed scarlet and eyed him in blank amazement.

"He is quite—er, official," he laughed. "Don't you see? You have cajoled me into giving you my confidence, telling you things about the Hartshorne investigation that the newspapers don't dream of. If you only dared tell Mrs. Cowles, she would be the most surprised person on earth!—Now, if I read the lady aright, she will move heaven and earth to find out what you know."

"I see," Rose said slowly. The flush had died away. "And what is it that I know, Mr. Harvey?"

"That Mrs. Hartshorne was murdered, not in her own home, but in the conservatory at the Ledyards, during the dance."

"You can't mean it!" She caught at his arm as if to steady herself. "Oh, Mr. Harvey, that's not the truth, is it?"

"Yes, Miss Adare. Please say that was why the conservatory door was locked at midnight; don't forget, because it was Mrs. Cowles who discovered and remarked upon that closed door. Tell her, too, that the body was removed secretly to Mrs. Hartshorne's home after the dance, that I have absolute proof of all this, and ask her if she noticed anything strange in Miss Ledyard's appearance or manner."

"Miss Ledyard!" Rose gasped. "Mr. Harvey, don't tell me she knew anything about it! I can't believe it, I won't! It's too horrible."

"*It* was Miss Ledyard, her butler and the chauffeur who

took the body home," he explained quietly. "But what I want you to impress on Mrs. Cowles' mind is that I am on the point of arresting Beatrice Ledyard for the murder of Mrs. Hartshorne. She must believe that absolutely; that is my whole object in asking your cooperation in this. Mrs. Cowles must be sure that I am convinced of her friend's guilt."

"But you're not." Rose eyed him shrewdly. "I can scarcely believe it yet, that she was the woman Miss Bayne saw from the window, but even if she is, there can't be murder on her soul! You are not going to arrest her!"

"That may be necessary, if your little talk with Mrs. Cowles does not have the result I hope for," he responded. "You can realize now how important the task is, which I am giving you."

"Oh, I'll do my very best!" She hesitated and then asked: "It won't be bringing trouble on Mrs. Cowles, too, will it?"

"By no means. Mrs. Cowles has nothing whatever to do with the murder, herself; I can assure you of that. The next corner is yours and I will leave you now, Miss Adare. I hope you don't mind——?"

"I don't mind anything!" she cried recklessly, as she gave him her hand. "This affair is too terrible! And I feel as if I had gone too far in it to stop now. I would do anything in the world to help you find out who killed Mrs. Hartshorne!"

After her trim figure had disappeared around the corner Paul paid a call on a theatrical agent of his acquaintance, stopped at one of the larger newspaper offices and then returned to his rooms. He had succeeded in the purpose of his interview with Miss Ledyard, but this achievement left him with no sense of victory. Instead he felt oddly

baffled. Had she, indeed, killed Mrs. Hartshorne? Had Swarthmore; or was there still a third as yet unknown person to be reckoned with?

The telephone all at once invaded his meditation. At the sound of the agitated feminine voice which came to him over the wire he smiled in quiet exultation.

"Is this Mr. Harvey? This is Mrs. Cowles speaking. Mr. Harvey, would you find it convenient to call on me this evening? I have some—some information which I think would be of value to you."

"Yes, Mrs. Cowles. I shall be glad to hear what you have to tell me, but I think that I am already in possession of the main facts of the case——"

"Oh, no you are not!" she broke in upon him. "You couldn't be! What I want to tell you is known to no one in the world but myself and one other person. You couldn't possibly have learned it and I am sure it will totally change your—whatever opinion you may have formed. Can you come soon?"

"In half an hour, Mrs. Cowles."

On his arrival, he found the lady pacing the floor in unconcealed perturbation. There was no attempt at pose as she offered her cold little hand.

"Mr. Harvey, I don't want you to scold me for withholding information from you when you came to see me last Saturday," she began. "I did not tell you then only because it did not seem to have any bearing on the case you were investigating. Then, too, I could not endure the thought of being dragged into the affair myself, even as a witness!"

"You have changed your mind now?" he asked significantly.

"Yes." She flushed. "I've been thinking, and it really

seems to be my duty to tell you. Besides, so many wild rumors are flying about. Some people question the fact that Mrs. Hartshorne was killed in her own home where she was found, and I have even heard it whispered that the crime might in some way have been committed at the Ledyards', during the dance. Of course that is absurd, but it convinced me that I ought to tell you everything and save you, perhaps, from—from making a terrible mistake."

"Thank you," he responded quite gravely. "I shall be grateful if you will tell me now."

"Do you remember asking me the last time you were here if I saw or heard anything at the dance which might have suggested a motive for the crime, and I said that as far as I knew Mrs. Hartshorne hadn't an enemy in the world? Well, I fibbed, Mr. Harvey! I daren't suggest that sufficient motive for such a crime was established, but Mrs. Hartshorne made a very bitter and vindictive enemy that night. I told you, too, that I passed Mrs. Hartshorne in the conservatory but did not notice who her companion was; that was another fib. I did not pass her, she never even knew I was there, and I did see who was with her and heard what passed between them."

"At what time was this, Mrs. Cowles?"

"Sometime between eleven and half-past."

"And Mrs. Hartshorne's companion?"

"It was Cornelius Swarthmore." Her voice had sunk to a whisper but she rallied quickly and went on: "I had promised the same dance to three men, and I didn't know how I could get out of it, so I slipped into the conservatory and sat down on a bench behind some palms. Mrs. Hartshorne entered with Mr. Swarthmore and I would have made known my presence; but the first words I heard rooted me to the spot and then it was too late.

"'An older man, in whom you can feel a greater sense of protection?' Mr. Swarthmore seemed to be repeating the words. He was in one of his seething rages, only more intense than I had ever seen him. 'So you're throwing me over for someone else? By God, if it's that sanctimonious old goat Braddock——!'

"I shrank back behind the palms, but he evidently lost control of himself and seized her, for I heard the quick rustle of her gown and then she spoke in a cold, disdainful way which must have been maddening to him.

"'Stop, please, you are hurting me. There is no need of melodrama, Mr. Swarthmore, nor is there occasion for insult. I have exercised a woman's privilege and changed my mind, that is all, and your present mood shows me that my decision is a wise one. If I choose to marry Mr. Braddock or anyone else that is my affair.'

He gave a nasty sort of laugh.

"'And only yesterday you permitted me to hold you in my arms, you promised to be my wife! God, what an infatuated ass I was! I think I understand you now. No wonder you wanted to keep our engagement a secret! You wouldn't commit yourself publicly until you had played the bigger fish to see if he would rise to your bait! Did you think me a sentimental boy, a fool of whom you could dispose so easily? I was disarmed before the woman I thought you were, but I know how to deal with a common adventuress! I'll spoil your little game for you——'

"'Will you really?' Her tone seemed to be filled with quiet amusement. 'What will you do, Mr. Swarthmore?'

"'I'll go to Braddock and show you up, by God! I'll look up that past of yours and find out why you've been so d---d secretive! I'll——'

"'I don't believe that you will do any of these things.'

Her voice was still quiet but there was something in it like the snap of a whip. 'You will remember that I could show you up in turn, my friend.'

"'What do you mean?' It sounded like the snarl of some animal, the way he spoke.

"'How about your contracts with the government? The undergrade stuff and the padded bids? Did you think I was a child not to understand, to accept so easily your statement that there was nothing illegal about your transactions?"

"'Prove it," he dared her, and she laughed.

"' My method is not so crude as yours, Mr. Swarthmore! I never threaten anything I cannot prove. A certain private secretary whom you discharged helped me to verify your statements and a foreman let out on the last strike corroborated him. I collected this data merely as an investment on which it might be possible for me to realize some day. Your animosity might drive me from Eastopolis, but for me the world is wide; for you there is the Federal prison if I speak!'

"Well, after that it seemed as though a perfect storm of fury burst from him upon her! I can't remember what he said or the names he called her, it all came in such a hideous rush of invective and threats and curses, too! I sat there stunned and shivering and I think she must have been a little afraid of him, herself, for she shrank away from him, but he followed her. I was simply dying to escape without their discovering me, and I peeped out between the palms to see if the way was clear.

"They had retreated to the other side of the conservatory over by Colonel Ledyard's orchids, and with their backs turned I saw my chance and slipped out of the door into the ball-room. You don't know, Mr. Harvey, what a relief it

was! I found Freddie Gaylor and made him sit out a dance on the stairs with me while I collected myself, and in a moment Mr. Swarthmore tore his way through the crowd, still in a white-hot rage, and made for the cloak-room.

"It was then that poor Trix—Miss Ledyard, met him, and tried to speak to him, but he never noticed her in his fury. She'd been standing near the foot of the stairs, looking into the ball-room. As he shouldered his way past she laid her hands on his arm, but she shook her off unseeingly, with a savage thrust like a struggling animal! He must have left the house at once."

"You are sure of the words you have repeated to me?" Paul asked.

"Absolutely!" Bébé Cowles shuddered. "It seems as though they had been stamped on my brain!"

"But you can remember no more? Nothing definite of the threats Mr. Swarthmore uttered just before you slipped away?"

"Isn't it enough?" Her eyes widened, then she turned her head slightly from him and added very low: "I never saw Mrs. Hartshorne again. Did anyone else? Did she leave that conservatory alive?"

Chapter XV.

THE SECOND BULLET.

"SORRY to intrude upon you at such a late hour, Mr. Swarthmore." Paul's tone was conciliatory, but beneath its smoothness there sounded an unmistakable note of authority. "A few additional facts have come to my attention in the Hartshorne case, and I shall have to ask you to amend and amplify your former statement to me."

"Fire away, Mr. Harvey!" Swarthmore smiled, but his geniality was obviously forced and his dark eyes were somber. "Will you smoke?—No? Well, don't mind if I do. Now go ahead; I am quite at your disposal."

"You told me that you had shown Mrs. Hartshorne a certain amount of attention because she amused you, Mr. Swarthmore, but you neglected to tell me that an engagement existed between you." Paul went straight to the point at issue.

"It did not, at the time of her death." Swarthmore shrugged. "I can't see how you obtained that information, and frankly, since she was dead, I did not consider the incident as being anyone's affair but my own."

"But it was only on the day before the dance that Mrs. Hartshorne promised to become your wife."

"Now, how the devil did you know that!" Swarthmore frowned and added hastily: "It makes no difference, however; the engagement was just a momentary whim on the

lady's part. She changed her mind almost immediately."

"In favor of someone else?"

"You are going a bit too far!" Swarthmore's voice trembled. "I'm not on the witness stand, you know. If the lady had made any other matrimonial plans she did not honor me with her confidence."

"Mr. Swarthmore, I have evidence that Mrs. Hartshorne did acquaint you with her intention to marry someone else and that you denounced her as an adventuress and threatened to expose her mercenary motives to the man she had chosen; Wendle Braddock."

"What do you mean?" The other cried. "Who gave you that information?"

"Someone who overheard a part of your conversation together in the conservatory," responded Paul. "You told me that you had had no quarrel with Mrs. Hartshorne."

"Because it was no one's d—d business!" Swarthmore had sprung from his chair and his face was crimson and mottled with rage, but beneath the bluster there was an underlying note of fear. "Who was the eavesdropper? What do you know? How much did they hear? Tell me, or I'll——"

"Don't get excited, Mr. Swarthmore; you may need to keep all your wits about you," Paul advised coolly. "You told Mrs. Hartshorne that you would spoil her game, yet instead of making good your threat and denouncing her to Braddock when you met him face to face in the ball-room door a few minutes later, you merely laughed at him and left the house. Why did you not keep your word?"

Swarthmore laughed harshly but in unmistakable relief.

"The woman wasn't worth it! I could get even with old Braddock more satisfactorily by letting him marry her and find out later the sort of woman he was saddled with.

A man may threaten anything in the heat of passion and then think better of it."

"You are sure that is why you refrained? You were not afraid that she would retaliate by making certain disclosures against you, Mr. Swarthmore?"

There was silence for a moment, and then the other man flung himself back in his chair with a gesture of surrender.

"So your eavesdropper heard that, too, did he?" he said slowly. "I've nothing more to say, Mr. Harvey. I'm not the first man to meet his finish through a woman, but by God, she's paid for it, in advance!"

"By her death?"

The other nodded grimly.

"The woman was a blackmailer. Your informant must have told you that, if he heard the whole altercation. She followed up what I had told her in confidence until she had the goods on me, clean; she boasted that she had verified my statements as an investment on which she could make me pay dividends. She only got what was coming to her and I'm ready to pay the consequences of my own idiocy. I gambled and lost, that's all."

"You admit, then, that you killed her?" Paul asked quietly.

"Admit, nothing!" Swarthmore retorted, staring. "I'm talking about my deals with the government. I suppose it is Atlanta for mine, but bigger men than I are dipping into Uncle Sam's pockets right now and getting away with it. If I hadn't gotten the graft some other fellow would. As for killing that woman—Say, do you think I broke into her house, waited for her to come home and then fired a shot that would have been calculated to bring a bunch of shrieking female servants about my ears? Do I look like that kind of a boob?"

"No, Mr. Swarthmore, but as Mrs. Hartshorne was not murdered in her own home; as she was shot there in the Ledyards' conservatory within a few minutes of the time you uttered your threat against her——"

"What!" Swarthmore's face turned ashen and his voice all but failed him. "Say that again, Harvey!"

"She was dead before you left the house! Dead five minutes after she intimated that she would turn informer against you."

"It can't be! There's some mistake!" The amazement and incredulity in Swarthmore's tone seemed too unstudied to have been assumed. "God, man, the thing's impossible! The shot would have been heard, even above the racket of that confounded jazz band, and how could the body have been conveyed to her home? It is absurd, on the face of it."

Paul's keen eyes had never left the other's face and now they gleamed with a light of newly found conviction, but he spoke without a change of tone.

"It is true, however."

"Who did it?" Swarthmore demanded. "Did your busy little eavesdropper witness the murder? I left Mrs. Hartshorne with a tacit agreement to keep out of each other's game. If she was killed so soon after it may be that your informant had a hand in it himself."

"My informant was a woman, Mr. Swarthmore."

"A woman? Not——?"

"Miss Ledyard?" Paul finished for him as he hesitated. "Unfortunately no. It would have been better, perhaps, had she learned how little cause she had for future jealousy."

"We'll leave Miss Ledyard out of this discussion, if you please," Swarthmore said stiffly.

"I am afraid that will be impossible," Paul retorted. "When you left the conservatory and started toward the cloak-room, Miss Ledyard tried to intercept you; but you rejected her overtures, flung off the hand she had laid upon your arm. That was the final straw."

"I was beside myself," explained Swarthmore. "I realized, too, for the first time in all those weeks, what a fool I had been. Beatrice Ledyard was the last person I wanted to encounter just then."

"That is a pity, for Miss Ledyard evidently put a wrong construction on your manner." Paul spoke casually, but each word went home to the man before him. "Her pride as well as her heart were involved; and that is a dangerous combination with such a woman as she. When you repudiated her so publicly you aroused a spirit of desperation which would stop at nothing. Before you reached the cloak-room she had entered the conservatory——"

"Stop!" Swarthmore rose slowly. "Why have you come to me? What are you driving at? If your eavesdropper was still there does she dare to accuse Miss Ledyard——?"

"My informant had slipped out of the conservatory before you left," Paul admitted. "But since it was not you who killed Mrs. Hartshorne, and I am convinced that you are telling the truth in this respect, Mr. Swarthmore, I am forced to conclude——"

"Your conclusions are damnably false!" The other burst in upon him. "I treated Miss Ledyard like a cur, if you will have it so, but she is utterly incapable of such a crime as you intimate! Whatever her feeling toward Mrs. Hartshorne, she could not have shot her down in cold blood! It is unthinkable!"

"I already have proof that she concealed the body; that she, with the help of two people whom she trusted, con-

veyed it to the Farragut Street house," Paul continued relentlessly. "She has confessed——"

"Confessed!" The man before him staggered as though he had received a mortal blow. "It's not true! Trixy! Oh, my God! My God!"

"That's all, Mr. Swarthmore." Paul rose and picked up his hat.

The other looked at him dazedly.

"I'm under arrest?" he asked in a thick, scarcely audible tone.

"Not by me; I'm on a murder case," Paul responded. "The Federal authorities have been notified, however. It is only fair to tell you that. Good-night, Mr. Swarthmore!"

At noon the next day Paul presented himself once more at the Ledyard residence. Hickson, pale and hollow-eyed, admitted him, and following him into the reception room laid a shaking hand upon his arm.

"Oh, sir, you haven't come for her!" he pleaded in a broken voice. "She didn't do it, Mr. Harvey! I swear it, sir, she never had a hand in the lady's death! We only—only took the body home where it rightfully belonged. Take me up for that and William, too, but leave her out of it, for God's sake! It would kill her father and mother, and she did nothing worse than try to shield them from the trouble that would have come if the body had been found there!"

"That's all right, Hickson; I haven't come to arrest anybody. But it would have been better for all of you if you had told me the truth from the start," Paul returned. "Ask Miss Ledyard if she will see me, please!"

"Miss Ledyard is very ill!" the butler stammered, adding hastily, "but, of course, she will see you, sir. If you will wait just a few minutes——?"

When she appeared Beatrice Ledyard bore out the truth

of his assertion. She was wan and haggard and from her drawn face and dull, brooding eyes the last trace of girlhood had vanished. It was a woman desolate and all but consumed with the warring emotions which racked her, who faced the detective from the doorway.

"What do you want of me now, Mr. Harvey?" she asked listlessly. "I hoped that after yesterday I should be left in peace for a little while; such peace as I may find. I suppose that what I did with the aid of Hickson and his son may constitute a violation of the law, but I understand that you have not come to place us under arrest?"

"No, Miss Ledyard." His tone was gravely considerate. "But did you not stop to realize that when your ruse was discovered, as it must inevitably have been, you would be in a far more serious position than if you had left the body where you discovered it?"

"I never dreamed that anyone would know," she responded. "My only thought was to rid the house of such a fearful thing. It seemed to me that if the body were beyond our threshold, our responsibility would end. I cannot describe it, but it was the same instinctive feeling with which one struggles to throw off a nightmare."

"But why did you take the initiative? Would not instinct have directed you to summon your natural protector, your father?" Paul insisted gently.

Her gesture of repudiation was unguarded.

"No! My father would never have permitted the removal of the body in that way. He would have made a scene, locked the doors, summoned the police and precipitated us all into a scandal we could never have lived down."

"Was it the scandal alone which you dreaded, Miss Ledyard, or had you cause for greater apprehension in the locking of the doors and arrival of the police?" He gazed

levelly into her eyes. "Was there not something which preyed upon you more than the scandal, a revelation which must be averted at all costs? Was it fear of notoriety or fear lest we discover the truth which led you to plan so reckless and hazardous a maneuver?"

"What had I to fear? I did not kill Mrs. Hartshorne."

"Miss Ledyard,"—he changed his tactics abruptly—"you told us yesterday that you helped your mother to receive and then danced like the rest. Do you remember where you were at the moment when you became dizzy and fatigued and decided to seek refuge in the conservatory?"

"No." There was a note of awakened caution in her monosyllabic response and she seemed to be gathering her all but spent forces to meet the fresh attack.

"You were not dancing, or your partner would have accompanied you. Were you not in the hall, near the foot of the staircase?"

"I do not know; I may have been."

"Did not the impulse come to you to go to the conservatory immediately after your repulse by Mr. Cornelius Swarthmore, after you had laid your hand upon his arm as he charged past you in the crowd, and had shaken you off roughly without a word or glance of recognition?"

"Ah!" The little cry was like a quivering breath of pain. Paul pressed home his advantage.

"From where you stood in the hall, the conservatory door was visible across a corner of the ball-room. You had seen Cornelius Swarthmore emerge from it, read the murderous fury in his face and strove to intercept him. When you failed, was it not then that the impulse came to go to enter the conservatory and find out for yourself what had so enraged him? Did you perhaps have a premonition of what you would discover there?"

"Stop!" She put her hands wildly to her head as if to shut out the inexorable voice. "It isn't true! You are trying to build up a case on idle gossip and lies, lies! I did make an attempt to speak to Mr. Swarthmore, but he was too excited and preoccupied to stop in that throng. I doubt if he recognized me or was conscious that a hand had detained him. He did seem irritated and annoyed but not—not to the extent you have been told; that is a baseless exaggeration. It was fully five minutes, possibly ten, after his departure that I entered the conservatory and found her lying there, more than time enough for anyone else to have fired the shot and escaped. I tell you Neely Swarthmore is innocent!"

For all the vehemence of her words, a blank look of terror overspread her drawn face, in which there was no element of surprise or amazement. It was manifest beyond all doubt that the thought had haunted her and even as she so fiercely repudiated it, returned to torture her afresh.

Paul drew a deep breath. But in the midst of his elation at the point scored there came once more the sensation of defeat. Both Swarthmore and Miss Ledyard were innocent. Who, then, was the mysterious third factor in the case and what was his motive? With consummate nerve and daring, with the patience of a grievance long nursed, he must have watched and bided his time until the psychological moment between Swarthmore's precipitate departure from the conservatory and Miss Ledyard's entrance. His victim had recognized him, had read his purpose and sought to avert it when she drew the pistol with which she had been armed every hour, sleeping and waking, since the previous Tuesday night. Had he wrested the weapon from her, fired the shot from it and then waited to replace it in her dying hand? It seemed unlikely, and yet one shell had

been discharged from it and the bullet which killed her had been of the same calibre.

Paul aroused himself from his reverie with a quick thrill of compunction for prolonging the mental agony of the young woman before him.

"Perhaps Mr. Swarthmore is guiltless after all, Miss Ledyard," he conceded. "But if we are to save him from arrest on such a charge as murder we must lose no time in finding out who was responsible for the crime. Could you —do you feel strong enough—to accompany me to the conservatory?"

"Oh, yes!" A faint color had sprung to her wan cheeks, a faint light suffused her eyes. She rose with alacrity. "Hickson found the empty cartridge shell this morning, half-buried in the soft loam among the orchids; but I'm afraid you won't find any other clues."

The conservatory presented a vastly different appearance with the noonday sun streaming in through the close-set windows upon the glowing masses of vari-colored blossoms, than when Paul had last seen it shrouded in gloom. On the threshold Beatrice Ledyard faltered and hung back; but Paul walked straight to the orchid bed and turning with his back to it gazed about him with minute care and attention to every possible detail.

At his left through the open door he glimpsed a corner of the ball-room and in a direct line with his eye, the alcove where the jazz band had been stationed; at his right down the vista of the conservatory the closed door at the end loomed blankly, while before him and behind, the walls of glass separated by narrow strips of wood and masonry rose to meet the concave panes of the dome. It was much the same survey that he had made on the previous Saturday. Yet he seemed still unsatisfied.

"Miss Ledyard," he turned to her at length. "Will you ask Hickson to bring me a step-ladder, please; one tall enough to reach the base of the dome, if you have one."

"We have, of course."

As she vanished to give the order Paul glanced again at the sealed door. If Mrs. Hartshorne had been impelled to whirl and face it, the shot which entered her heart might have come from any one of that row of windows before him.

When Hickson appeared with the ladder Paul mounted it and patiently scanned each inch of the wood panelling between the windows, starting at the farther end and working toward a spot opposite the orchid bed.

Watching him, Beatrice Ledyard temporarily forgot her dread, and slipping down the narrow aisle seated herself on a bench beneath an orange tree, her eyes following his every move.

"What is it that you are looking for?" she ventured after an interval.

"Something which may exist only in a theory of mine," he responded. "Nevertheless, it is worth testing, I think. Do you know, Miss Ledyard, if any of these windows were open on the night of the dance?"

"I am positive that they were not. My father had given strict orders to that effect because of the orchids; he is dreadfully fussy about the temperature."

"It is unlikely," he pursued, "that a pane of glass in any of them was shattered and replaced, say, on Friday morning."

"Quite. I am sure, in fact I know, that nothing of the sort occurred, for Hickson and I searched here for possible clues on Friday and we would have noticed it."

Paul had reached the tenth window from the end and

directly across from the orchid bed, when he gave a low cry of triumph. Pulling a pen-knife from his pocket, he hacked at the woodwork at a distance of approximately fifteen feet from the floor.

"Oh, what is it?" Miss Ledyard rose. "What have you found?"

"This!" He ran down the ladder and held a small, round object out upon his palm for her inspection.

Miss Ledyard gave one horrified glance and then shrank away.

"A bullet!" she cried.

Paul nodded.

"The bullet from her pistol," he announced. "Her shot went wild, you see, and it is imbedded in the woodwork; the miracle of it is that it struck there instead of shattering one of the windows. It was not only the result of a murder which you came upon, Miss Ledyard, but of a duel as well!"

"Excuse me, sir. You are wanted on the telephone." Hickson's head appeared in the doorway. "The gentleman won't give his name, sir, and he—he seems urgent."

"Say, what are you doing anyway?" The Chief's exasperated voice reached Paul's ears over the wire. "I've tried to get you everywhere else in this town! Do you know Cornelius Swarthmore has skipped?"

"That's all right!" laughed Paul. "We don't want him! The Federal authorities are on his trail and he can't get far; they'll attend to his case."

"Federal—!" The Chief was evidently having difficulty with his speech.

"For defrauding the government," Paul explained. "He had nothing to do with our case, and neither had the—the person we suspected. The trouble with us, sir, is that we've been playing the favorites, but we've got to pick a dark horse now, to win."

Chapter XVI.

THE WARNING.

LEAVING the Ledyard residence Paul Harvey looked in on his friend the theatrical booking agent and found him literally barricaded in his private office while the outer rooms were jammed to overflowing with a surging mass of showily bedizened femininity.

"Say, Harvey, you ain't got your nerve or nothing, wishin' this here Battalion of Death on me, have you?" Mr. Glaub expostulated aggrievedly. "Never since I'm in the business have I seen such a fool ad, as this one that I let you put my name to, without even lookin' at it! For Gawd's sake why didn't you leave me the wording of it?"

"Because you would never have caught the fish I'm after with the bait you would use." Paul responded, laughingly.

"Maybe not, but I ain't draggin' the river for every wall-eyed pike that wants to break into the fillums!" retorted Mr. Glaub, thumping the newspaper spread out before him. "Listen here. 'Young girl for star emotional parts in feature motion pictures. Must be good dresser. Experience unnecessary. Exceptional opportunity for big career.' Say, you don't advertise for that kind; you do a Pavlowa to sidestep 'em. Did you get that bunch out there? I've been weedin' 'em out all morning an' still they come! The one you're after ain't showed up yet, though."

"Give her time," advised Paul. "You haven't forgotten what I told you about the white fox scarf and the paradise in her hat?"

"Time?" Mr. Glaub snorted ignoring the question as superfluous. "I got to get nine acts for the southern circuit by five o'clock and a full chorus of twelve for Minck's Babydoll Burlesquers. *Oser,* I should got time to burn! You done me a good turn, Harvey, when you fixed it that I shouldn't get stuck with the four thousand bucks counterfeit that Reuhl crowd passed on me, an' I ain't forgettin' it, but I ask you is it good business for the office of a high class, exclusive B. A. to look like a refugee station? Vallory come in from across the hall just now to ask me was I opening up a matrimonial bureau or holdin' a suffrage rally!"

"Vallory?" Paul repeated quickly. "The jazz band leader?"

"That's him. Smart feller, too. He's got all the big bugs goin' with a collection of sour notes an' boiler factory noises that would have got the hook in a Mississippi boat show a few years ago. Don't it beat all what the public'll stand for?"

"It does," Paul rose. "I'm not going to take up any more of your valuable time. Let me know if the movie aspirant I'm after shows up and keep her till you get me, will you?"

"Sure I'll keep her," affirmed Mr. Glaub. "But you might give 'em the once-over yourself as you go out."

Paul darted one swift comprehensive glance about at the sea of eager faces which confronted him and then beat a hasty retreat to the hall. On a door opposite he saw in imposing gilt letters "Vallory's Jazz Orchestra," and in a lower corner of the glass panelling "Max Vallory, Conductor."

He paused for a moment in thought, knocked lightly and then without awaiting a response he turned the knob and

entered. A gawky, freckle-faced youth was seated behind the desk, a smiling young woman was tapping vigorously away on a typewriter and from behind a closed door marked "private" came a thin, melodious whistle repeating a bar or two of a popular refrain over and over with a slow, drawling syncopation that was irresistible.

Before Paul could voice a query the door opened and a slim, nattily dressed figure stood before him. The man appeared young at first sight, but a closer inspection revealed mature lines about his clean-cut jaw and lips and the melancholy expression of his dark eyes ill accorded with the careless merry whistle of a moment before.

As his glance rested upon Paul he smiled pleasantly and came forward.

"You are looking for me?" he asked speaking with a slight, indefinable accent. "I'm Max Vallory."

His white teeth flashed as his face lightened and Paul noted the lithe, cat-like grace of movement which told of the trained body of an athlete.

"Yes," he responded. "Can you give me a few minutes, Mr. Vallory? I've come upon a confidential matter——"

The other waved him into the private office.

"What can I do for you?"

"I'm Harvey, a special investigator employed on the Hartshorne case," Paul announced. "You know of course, Mr. Vallory, that Mrs. Hartshorne was a guest at the Red Cross dance given by Mrs. Amasa Ledyard last Thursday night, at which you appeared with your orchestra."

Vallory nodded.

"I read of it in the papers the next day," he said gravely. "Bad business, wasn't it?

"Very," Paul agreed. "Did you know Mrs. Hartshorne by sight?"

"No. I never was engaged to play for her at any of her affairs. That's the only way I would come in contact with swells, you know," Vallory observed frankly. "She hasn't given any entertainments on a large scale, has she? You see, I've only been in town a short time, Mr. Harvey, but I'm booked solid ahead now; the Ledyards' is only the fifth place at which I've appeared outside of the Grosvenor grill, where we played for two weeks. Before that we toured the country. You'll hear a lot of fellows claiming the credit, but I developed the jazz idea as we work it; developed it from a ragged bunch of negro musicians doing comedy stunts on a levee two or three years ago. I picked my own men wherever I could find a clown with an ear for music or a player with a funny streak in him and I've got an aggregation that it would be hard to beat. We've been a riot from coast to coast—but you're not here to talk shop, are you? What's the dope that you want from me?"

"As you must be aware also from the newspapers, Mrs. Hartshorne was not seen by anyone after leaving the dance until her body was discovered in her home the next day." Paul chose his words with care. "It is a part of my necessary routine work, therefore, to trace her movements during the evening at the Ledyards'. You did not know her, but perhaps you may recognize a description of her costume and general appearance. She was of medium height and pretty, with bluish eyes and brown hair, and she wore a peach-colored satin dance frock trimmed with silver and a string of pearls——"

Vallory laughed.

"Excuse me, Mr. Harvey, but that's too many for me! There seemed to be a thousand people there, and I don't have any time to rubber around at the guests where we play! If you'd ever seen and heard us, you would know

that I'm about the busiest man in seven states when we get going! I play the bass drum, snare drum, cymbals, rattles, cow-bells and every other noise-producing instrument I can lay my hands on, and keep up a running fire of acrobatic comedy going at the same time, besides directing and watching my men. I tell you it's no cinch. When I finish with a number I'm about all in!"

"I believe you." Paul smiled and drew from his pocket a folded sheet of paper. "I have here a rough diagram of the Ledyards' ball-room. Here is where your orchestra was stationed in this alcove, was it not?"

The jazz leader spread the paper out on his desk.

"Yes. That double door opposite, across the ball-room, led into the hall. And this smaller door in the side wall to our left opened into some kind of a sun parlor or conservatory, I think. Anyway, I remember noticing a lot of palms and things in there when the door was open during the first part of the evening. I would have given something for a chance to get in there and cool off!"

"You say the door was open the first part of the evening. Was it closed later?" Paul asked in a simulation of careless surprise.

"Yes. We laid off during the supper hour and a string orchestra played, while we had a bite to eat ourselves in one of the smaller reception rooms," Vallory explained. "When we went back to the ball-room I noticed that the door was shut and I guess it stayed so the rest of the night."

"Did you observe anyone at all who went in or out of the conservatory during the earlier hours?"

"No, I can't say that I did," the other responded candidly after a pause. "I'd like to help you out, but honestly I didn't notice anybody. It's some job to keep up the pace we hit!"

"Did you hear anything from that direction?" Paul persisted. "Any noise like a cry or an explosion?"

Vallory chuckled again.

"Say, I wouldn't hear a fifty-five shell if it went off in front of me when we're playing!" Then his face grew grave once more. "You don't mean that anything happened there! The lady wasn't shot——!"

"I don't think it is likely." Paul picked up his hat. "Still, nobody knows when she left, and as she wasn't seen alive afterwards, I've got to look into every possible contingency."

"Well, I'm sorry I can't help you any," Vallory said cordially. "You're up against a tough proposition, all right. I've seen more than one nasty scrap in my time, but this is the nearest I ever came to a murder in swell society! Say, I wish you'd come and hear us play sometime. We're going to give a couple of open air concerts in Bainbridge Park to boost the next government loan. Why don't you drop around?"

Paul promised and took his departure, the plaintive, monotonous whistle following him down the hall to the elevator. The impulse which had led him to the one possible witness of that tragic scene in the conservatory had been an idle one and he had not anticipated any startling revelation, yet he felt an odd sense of disappointment that the luck which had favored him so far in his investigation should fail him now.

In spite of all that he had accomplished he seemed to be back again at the starting point; his discoveries, important as they were, had led him no nearer to the ultimate solution and the mystery was as deep as at the moment when he had firsrt laid eyes upon the slain woman.

But one ray of light appeared to point to a possible remaining clue; Rose Adare and the servants of the Harts-

horne household had testified to an abrupt and inexplicable change in the demeanor of their mistress dating back to the previous Tuesday night, just a week ago. That this change had been due to fear there could be no doubt; fear for her very life, of the doom which eventually did overtake her, for from that night, too, she had armed herself.

Mrs. Hartshorne had dined at the Gaylors', gone to the Ledyards' to play bridge, then suddenly pleaded an excuse and with Swarthmore's escort returned to her home. The swift change had come to her at the Ledyards', but it was inconceivable that an impertinent question or two from the lips of a jealous girl should have wrought such a metamorphosis. What subtle alarm could have reached her, what note of warning sounded in her ears?

At half-past three that afternoon when the closing market reports were in from Wall Street and his business of the day was transacted, Colonel Ledyard was on the point of leaving his office when Paul Harvey was ushered in.

"Bless my soul, I thought you had finished with us!" the rotund little man exclaimed good-naturedly. "I'll know enough never to commit a murder in this town, by Gad! What are you after now, Mr. Harvey?"

"Just a little additional information about Mrs. Hartshorne, Colonel Ledyard," Paul responded. "Do you remember the last time you saw her prior to the dance?"

The Colonel pondered for a moment and then nodded vigorously.

"I do. It was on Tuesday, when she dropped in for a bridge rubber or two."

"Which she did not remain to play," supplemented Paul.

"No; had a headache or something. Swarthmore took her home. You've heard about Swarthmore, haven't you? The Federal authorities——!"

"Yes, Colonel Ledyard." Paul stemmed the other's flow of words. "But about Tuesday evening. Do you recall the subject of the conversation just before Mrs. Hartshorne's arrival?"

"We were discussing her," replied the older man with some hesitation. "Wendle Braddock, Dr. Perrine and Mrs. Cowles had dined with us, and the ladies had their coffee in the drawing-room. When we joined them they were pulling Mrs. Hartshorne to pieces; at least, Trixy was. My wife was defending her while Mrs. Cowles was on the fence, so to speak; you know what women are!

"Then Trix lit into us and called our attention to the fact of how little we knew about Mrs. Hartshorne and her past. Wendle Braddock was standing up for her, when she was announced with Mr. Swarthmore."

"She did not at first mention her headache?"

"Oh, no! She was talking in a most animated manner with Dr. Perrine, Wendle Braddock and me, when Trix came up and joined in the conversation, switching it rather abruptly to the past and asking Mrs. Hartshorne one or two pointed questions. Mrs. Hartshorne replied in an evasive sort of way and almost immediately pleaded a headache and left. Braddock and Swarthmore had a little tilt, as I remember, over the question of escorting her home, and Swarthmore won out."

"What was the subject of the conversation between Mrs. Hartshorne, Mr. Braddock, Dr. Perrine and yourself when your daughter joined you?" Paul asked.

"Good Lord, man, I don't know! We were all a bit embarrassed, you see, because we had been discussing her at the moment of her arrival and we manufactured small talk to fill in the gap." Colonel Ledyard paused. "But let me see. As I recall it, Dr. Perrine started the ball rolling

by mentioning some charity work connected with his parish, in which Mrs. Hartshorne was interested. I didn't pay much attention, but it was something about a banking and loan association. Braddock took a hand and the talk drifted to small investors in general and how they were the first and greatest victims of irregularity and fraudulent conversion on the part of bank officials. Braddock had just cited the case of a bank President in a smaller city who had wrecked the institution by speculating with the funds of the investors and gone to Atlanta for it, when Trix joined us."

Paul leaned forward with an intent, eager look in his eyes.

"Who was this banker? From what city?"

Colonel Ledyard shook his head.

"There you have me. I don't—" He caught himself up and slapped his desk resoundingly. "Gad, I remember now, because Braddock said the old chap had just been liberated on a suspended sentence on the score of ill-health after serving four of a twenty-year term. It was Zenas Prall, President of the Riverboro Bank."

Paul sat back in his chair.

"Did Mrs. Hartshorne seem interested in the conversation?" he asked.

"She was always interested in whatever was said around her. That was one of her greatest charms; any topic, from the fate of nations to the price of brass tacks, seemed to arouse her enthusiasm. She'd hang on your words as if you were the last authority. Deucedly clever, whatever else she was!" the Colonel conceded. "She said something, I remember, about it being very sad and tragic for the banker to have ruined his career, but her sympathies were naturally on the side of his victims. She could always be depended on to say the right thing."

"Well, I won't detain you any longer," Paul observed, rising. "But what was your own personal opinion, Colonel Ledyard, of the controversy your daughter had started? Did you agree with her that Mrs. Hartshorne had been accepted too readily without credentials?"

"I was on the fence, too, like Mrs. Cowles." The Colonel laughed. "It did strike me, when Trix spoke, that we had all been pretty easy, but I never suspected that there was anything actually wrong with the little woman; I don't know what to think even now. Her financial affairs were straight as a string and she didn't seem the kind to get mixed up in a personal scandal. I hope you'll let us know when you discover anything."

Paul went straight to Headquarters and sought an interview with his Chief, during which he told him of the discovery of the second bullet and all that it implied.

"I examined those windows in the conservatory very carefully," he added. "None of the panes of glass had been replaced recently, but the catch was comparatively simple, and a window pole stood in a corner. In spite of the Colonel's orders that the windows should remain closed it would have been a simple matter for any of the guests to have opened one, if he or she felt inclined for more air."

"How about the outside?" demanded the Chief. "Could they have been opened from there?"

"No. The sash could not have been reached, in the first place. After replying to your telephone call, I went over the ground thoroughly. The windows open on a narrow strip of garden and are about ten feet from the ground, with a ledge running along the entire length four feet below the level of the windows, upon which a reasonably active person might easily climb from the steps at the end that lead up to the sealed door. There was access to the garden

through the tradesman's gate, which I ascertained was left open on the night of the dance for the employees of the caterer."

"But look here!" Chief Burke expostulated. "You're taking a lot for granted. What makes you so certain that neither Beatrice Ledyard nor Swarthmore did the shooting?"

Paul made a gesture of impatience.

"Because each of them suspects the other, though on her part she wouldn't admit it in so many words and Swarthmore only broke down and betrayed what he thought when I led him to believe that she had virtually confessed to the murder. Then he skipped, as I expected him to, but I had already notified the Federal authorities and I've no doubt they'll round him up for the dirty work he has been doing on government contracts."

"Then we're no nearer the finish of this case than when we started!" the Chief lamented. "You've eliminated some more deadwood, but we don't know a thing about the woman or her past——"

"Just a moment," Paul interrupted quietly. "Do you remember the affair up in Riverboro about four years ago, when the principal bank there was wrecked by its president and he was sent to Atlanta?"

"Sure," responded the Chief promptly. "Zenas Prall, his name was. The truth came out just before the war started and he beat it, but they caught him in New York trying to book passage for some non-extradition port. But what has he got to do with it?"

"If they had an alarm out for him, his description may be on file in the records here," Paul remarked, ignoring the question. "Ask one of the boys to look it up, will you, Chief?"

His superior complied and when the clerk had departed upon his errand, returned to the attack.

"What are you driving at, anyway? Where does he come in on the Hartshorne affair?"

"I don't know that he does," Paul admitted frankly. "It's just a chance shot, but I mean to satisfy myself about it. He has just been let out on suspended sentence, you know, and I've got a hunch that the news wasn't pleasing to Mrs. Hartshorne. If I can discover some link which connects them in the past it may open up a new line of investigation."

The clerk reappeared and laid a communication, telegraphic in its brevity, before the Chief.

"There you are." The latter glanced over the document and handed it to his subordinate.

"'Age, fifty-four,'" Paul read. "Height, five feet, ten. Weight, one hundred and eighty. Light blue eyes, slightly near-sighted, no glasses. Smooth face, thick gray hair. Quiet, conservative dresser—' Well, Chief, I guess that's all I need. I'm leaving town for a few days; don't know how long I shall be away, but I'll keep in touch with you. Anyway, I'll look in on you again before I go."

With this Chief Burke was reluctantly forced to be content and Paul took his departure.

The description of the absconding banker remained in his thoughts. Incongruously enough, it merged with another which he had heard on the previous day. There were many points at variance, but corroding disgrace and four years' imprisonment might well account for the change.

Could it have been Zenas Prall whom Rose Adare had seen at the funeral, tottering down the aisle of the church to lay his hand upon the casket of Mrs. Hartshorne?

Chapter XVII.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

PAUL'S proposed departure from town, however, was temporarily delayed by a message which he found pinned to the table cover in his sitting room when he returned to pack.

It was written laboriously on a bit of brown wrapping paper and was evidently the handwork of Mrs. Swensen, who appeared intermittently to clean his modest apartments.

> "Mr. Harvey, sombady name glob call up on fone five time, he say got girl can't hold ware in davil you was he say come."

Even as he read it admiringly the telephone rang once more and the excited voice of Mr. Glaub came to him.

"Thank Gawd it's you! That square-head you've got is the limit. Say, I gotta squab here with hands like a kitchen mechanic who calls herself 'Sada Mula' an' wants the job! Paradise hat, white fox, mustard-yeller suit an' white spats. Seems kinder tongue-tied an' scared but she's puttin' a bold face on it. Thought I couldn't hold her, but I got her rehearsin' and practising faintin' spells now an' if you can get here before she breaks her neck you may get some dope out of her."

Paul sped down to the office of his friend and found it basking in blissful solitude after the influx of the morning. A tow-headed office boy with an expression of utter exhaustion on his relaxed face dozed in a corner. From be-

hind the door of the inner sanctum came a dull, crashing thud and an involuntary exclamation.

"Ow!"

"That's the stuff! You'll get over great!" The wearied but professionally enthusiastic tones of Mr. Glaub floated out upon the air. "Only you gotta remember that studio sets is built sort of flimsy an' if you come down like a ton of coal you're liable to bring the whole scene down with you! Try it again an' look out for the water cooler."

Paul walked over to the door and knocked briskly.

"Hello!" There was a world of relief in Mr. Glaub's voice. "Come in! I want you to shake hands with my new screen star, Miss Sada Mula."

But Paul had no opportunity, for the lady gave him one startled glance and burst into violent tears.

"Come now, Sadie," he said not unkindly, when the storm had subsided to a thin, gulping wail. "Crying won't get you out of this, you know. What did you run away for?"

"F—for this!" The erstwhile kitchen maid waved a hand vaguely about the office and put it once more to her eyes. "I w-wanted to g-go in the m-movies."

"Your aunt is deeply grieved and anxious," the detective went on gravely. "Why didn't you tell her?"

"Sh-she'd have s-stopped me, and my uncle would have m-made me go to work in a lunch-room!" Sadie came out cautiously from behind her screening hands and felt for her handkerchief. Her lips were sullen and she eyed him half-defiantly. "I ain't going back!"

"No, Sadie, you are not," he agreed. "You are coming down to Headquarters with me and tell the Chief of Police how much money you stole from Mrs. Hartshorne."

The girl's new-found assurance crumpled and a fresh outburst of tears came.

"I don't c-care! She's dead and it don't matter, and I had to have nice things to be a picture actress!" she sobbed. "It was my last chance to get away from pots and pans, and I don't care what you do to me! I just couldn't stand it!"

"Tell me about it," Paul urged sympathetically, with a cautioning glance at Mr. Glaub's excited face. "Did you take the money all at the same time or separately?"

"Little by little," responded Sadie. "I—I put it back once but then I went and got it again; she had so much and I didn't have any, it wasn't fair! I never had anything, no pretty clothes nor outings, nor a feller, like other girls; only dish-water and cook's scoldin's and my uncle's layin' down the law! Everybody in the movies seemed to be having a perfectly elegant time, and I knew I could do as good if I only had the clothes to get me a job! Mrs. Hartshorne, she gave Matilde some grand things every once in a while that she was through with, but Matilde wouldn't let me have them. She didn't want them herself—she was always mad when Mrs. Hartshorne gave them to her—and burned them in the stove. I wouldn't have touched the money if I'd known poor Mrs. Hartshorne was goin' to die so soon! It seemed awful mean, like I'd hurt her myself, and I was so ashamed I could have died, too. But then I thought she couldn't care, now, and I was bound to have my chance!"

"When did you first learn about the money being hidden about the house?" Paul asked.

"Oh, a long time ago; a couple of months, maybe." Sadie dried her eyes and sniffed. "Jenny comes down from the parlor one day scared to death and said she'd found a hundred-dollar bill in a little box on the mantel, and that Mrs. Hartshorne had said it was all right, that she had meant to leave it there. After that Jenny found a lot more,

scattered-like, and her talk about how easy it would be for some burglar or somebody to walk off with it kind of put an idea into my head. If Mrs. Hartshorne had so much money she didn't know where she put it all, why, she wouldn't miss some of it if it was taken. So I thought it wouldn't be any very great harm. At first I tried not to think about it at all, but every time I went to the movies it come back to me till I was nearly crazy. At last one day about a month ago Jenny was cleaning at the top of the house, cook was down with a toothache and Mrs. Hartshorne and Matilde was both out. I sneaked up to the parlor and sure enough I found two one-hundred dollar bills in a vase! I took out one of them and left the other, and hid what I'd taken under the rug in our basement sitting-room. I waited two or three days but nothin' happened, so one afternoon when everybody was out again I came up and took two hundred more from between the covers of some books in the bookcase."

"Is that all?" Paul eyed her sternly.

"N-no," she faltered. "I got scared and put the three hundred back, but it didn't seem to make any difference to anybody except me and I made up my mind to take it again as quick as I could. It seemed as if there never would come a time when I could get into that parlor once more without somebody snoopin' 'round, but last Wednesday when I saw that face at the window——"

"What face?" Paul interrupted.

"Oh, I didn't tell you about that!" she paused. "I was goin' to when you talked to me before, but that fat man who was with you yelled at me so, I didn't dare. It was after dark, but the gentleman that was having tea with Mrs. Hartshorne hadn't gone yet when I got through preparin' what I had to for dinner and went into the basement

sittin' room. I was starin' out the window watchin' the lights spring up in the houses across the street and wonderin' if I could get out that night to the movies when I saw a dark figure, like a shadow creepin' around the areaway and a face peeked in at the window right close to mine with only the glass between!"

"What was it like?"

"Like a corpse!" Sadie responded, with gruesome relish. "All but the eyes that was awful bright and blinkin'. He looked to be very old, for his face was all wrinkled and a lock of white hair showed under the hat he wore pulled low. He was terrible thin, too, and trembly, and I guess I s'prised him as much as he did me, for he ducked and jumped back and in a minute more he was gone. As for me I let a screech out of me that brought the cook in, but she wouldn't believe there'd been anybody there, and gave me a scoldin'.

"Late that night, after the other gentleman who had come for dinner was gone and the lights was all out I tiptoed down with a candle end and took the three hundred back from where I'd put it and another bill that I didn't dare stop to look at from a vase on the console table. I ran back up to the room I shared with the cook and stuffed the money under the mattress of my cot, thinkin' that if it should happen to be missed in the morning I could tell about the burglar I'd seen hangin' 'round and cook would have to back me up.

"But nobody said a word, and it bein' my afternoon off I took the money with me to my aunt's. I didn't dare look at it until I made an excuse for her to go across the hall to a neighbor's to borrow a long needle for a hat I was trimmin' and when I got her safe out of the way and saw the last bill I had taken I nearly fainted, for it was a five-hundred-dollar one! I sewed all the money up quick in

my pillow but I worried something awful when I went back to Mrs. Hartshorne's for fear my aunt would find it.

"Then Mrs. Hartshorne was found murdered the next day and I felt as if I'd brought ill-luck on her by stealin' from her, but it was too late to put the money back a second time. And now I'd lost my place uncle would make me go in that dirty old lunch-room his friend runs and that would be the end of everything if I didn't start out for myself. And now if only you hadn't found me, I'd have been a movie star!"

Mr. Glaub choked irrepressibly and Paul demanded:

"What have you done with all the money?"

"I—I spent a lot," Sadie confessed in a very small voice. "Sixty for this hat, and eighty-five for the fur, and fifty for the suit and about forty more for shoes and a suit-case and things to put in it. Then I've been livin' 'round in small hotels, a different one every night since Saturday. I haven't touched the five hundred yet; I was afraid to try to get it changed for fear people would ask me questions. Here's all I've got left."

She opened her purse and poured out upon Mr. Glaub's desk several crumpled bills and a handful of silver. Then from her waist she produced a crisp yellow-back and added it to the rest. As she sat gazing at it her lips trembled and once more the tears overflowed.

"Just when I had my chance!" she sobbed. "It ain't fair! I never had anything!"

The midnight train for Riverboro carried among its other passengers a certain slightly lame young man who occupied a compartment and fell quite easily into conversation with the conductor when that worthy appeared for his ticket. The young man, it appeared, had some capital of his own

and was thinking of establishing an amusement park in Riverboro, whereupon the conductor waxed enthusiastic, for the bustling little city at the terminus of the branch road proved to be his home town.

"Great place, sir. More money for its size, than any other city in the state!" he announced proudly. "Ought to be fine for your proposition on account of its being such a manufacturing center, and you won't find any competition but the fair grounds and a picnic grove. We've got four hotels, three banks, nine churches and two big department stores, to say nothing of the library and the town hall. Oh, you'll find us quite up to date! The best ain't none too good for us!"

"Three banks?" repeated the young man meditatively. "I'll have to do business with a bank right away."

"Yes, sir! First and Second National, and the Municipal; that used to be the Riverboro, but it failed a few years ago, wrecked by the president, Zenas Prall." The conductor paused to accept a cigar. "Thank you, sir, don't mind if I do! Prall, he went to jail, but they say he's out now. Beats all how those slippery fellers can get out of paying for what they do!"

"Has he shown up again in Riverboro?" the young man asked carelessly.

"By Godfrey, no!" The conductor ejaculated. "He made away with the savings of all the small shopkeepers, to say nothing of the foreign mill hands and factory workers. Riverboro's a law-biding community, but old Zenas' life wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel if he ever came back. The bank's all right now, though, under its new name and all reorganized; Edmund Coe is the only one left that used to be on the old Board, and his honesty never was questioned; he's the president now. You won't

go wrong doing business with them, and if you're a stranger in town with no lodgings engaged I'd advise you to try the Norton House; it's got a grill room and a Turkish bath and all the latest improvements. Yes, sir, there's nothing slow about Riverboro!"

The next morning as he deposited his bags in a jitney and climbed in after them for the ride to the Norton House, Paul concluded that the conductor had spoken truly. There seemed to be nothing slow about the cheery, prosperous-looking town. Embryo sky-scrapers were springing up on every hand, traffic policemen in much dignity stood at the intersections of car lines and the number of jewelery shops, motor-car agencies and sporting goods displays attested to the wealth of the community.

At ten o'clock Paul left the rather blatant gorgeousness of the Norton House and presented himself at the Muni- his request with the credentials with which he had supplied cipal Bank, where he asked to see the president, fortifying himself for the emergency.

President Coe proved to be a cadaverous individual, with a hook nose and a long goatee which persisted in intruding itself into the conversation. But he took kindly to the young stranger's enterprise, particularly when it developed that he required no additional financial backing to what he already possessed. The interview was an eminently satisfactory one and Paul remarked in conclusion:

"You've made an enviable reputation, Mr. Coe, by establishing this institution so solidly on the ruins of the old Riverboro. Prall's speculations and exposure must have been a frightful blow, not only to the depositors but to his associates and family."

President Coe's cordiality congealed, and his goatee waggled a protest at the tactless reference.

"He had no family, fortunately, except his housekeeper Mrs. MacNab," he replied stiffly. "The depositors are being reimbursed and his associates were too firmly entrenched in the public confidence to be affected by his disgrace. The Municipal, sir, has no connection whatever with the defunct Riverboro."

Out on the shady main street once more Paul made his way to a corner drug-store and much to the disgust of a supercilious clerk he confined his attention to the town directory. There were three MacNabs: David J., a painter and glazier, Wallace P., electrical supplies, and Mrs. Margaret A., the latter of Number Seven Hillside Avenue.

The morning was cool and pleasant, the wind from the river bearing only the merest suggestion of smoke from the towering factory chimneys which lined the bank, and Paul was tempted to walk to his destination. However, judicious inquiry revealed that Hillside Avenue was far out in the suburbs and he relinquished his impulse in favor of a trolley car. Its way led through the middle-class residential district but down broad intersecting avenues Paul caught glimpses of pretentious mansions and as they reached the outskirts of the town, imposing estates loomed up. He concluded that there must have been wide scope in the city's prosperity for Zenas Prall's activities.

The street became a road and started to mount an incline when at the next corner Paul descried a sign labelled 'Hillside Avenue' and descended. A double row of neat modern frame cottages, each in its well-kept garden, met his gaze and he walked down the pretty little lane to number seven. It was smaller than the rest but glistening with new paint and immaculately polished windows and an inconspicious sign beside the door announced that boarders would be acceptable.

Paul opened the gate and ascending the steps lifted the knocker.

A trim, middle-aged woman with graying hair drawn back in a severe knot and an austere, thin-lipped smile opened the door. She gave him a swiftly appraising glance and shook her head.

"I'm not buying anything to-day—" she began firmly, but Paul interrupted her.

"And I am not selling anything!" he laughed. "I am looking for a room and board. Can you accommodate me?"

"Oh, excuse me! I've been so pestered with salesmen and canvassers," she paused. "I've got a school teacher and two young men here now, but I guess I could take you if you don't mind a small room. About how much did you want to pay?"

"Anything in reason," Paul responded ingratiatingly. "I'm at the Norton House now; but it's too noisy and expensive. As I expect business will keep me here for some little time I want to find more homelike surroundings."

"You're a stranger in town?"

Paul understood the implied suggestion and nodded.

"Yes, but I can give you any references you desire. President Coe, of the Municipal Bank, will vouch for me——"

Mrs. MacNab drew herself up.

"You were never recommended here by Mr. Coe," she observed shortly.

"No," he smiled again. "I was taking a walk and stopped to admire your garden when I saw the sign."

"Well," Mrs. MacNab stepped aside, plainly impressed despite her evident disapproval of President Coe, by this nonchalant use of his name. "You won't find it much after the Norton House, but it's clean."

She showed him into a pleasant room, small but spotlessly neat and cheery and their bargain was soon concluded.

"You have some wonderful old furniture, Mrs. MacNab," Paul remarked as they descended the stairs.

"I've a few good pieces," she admitted. "I was housekeeper once in a—a fine old family and when everything was sold I managed to save these."

"Indeed?" he said quickly. "Who were they? I know most of the leading families around here in a business way."

Mrs. MacNab eyed him for a moment and then tilted her chin as if defiant of her momentary hesitation.

"The name was 'Prall'," she said. "But you'll not find any of them now. The last one of the family has gone away."

Paul returned to the hotel for his bags with the settled conviction that he had made decided headway; but a disquieting doubt remained. Could he persuade this dour, loyal creature to discuss her former employer—particularly if, as he suspected, there had been a woman in the case?

Chapter XVIII.

IN THE NIGHT.

"IT'S perfectly thrilling to have somebody from a big city like Eastopolis to talk to!" The fluffy-haired little school teacher, Paul's fellow boarder at Mrs. MacNab's, gazed down at him from the porch hammock with ingenuous delight.

He was seated on the steps almost at her feet, his back against a tube of blossoming azalea, watching the twilight deepen down the deserted lane. From the rear came the clatter of dishes, as Mrs. MacNab cleared away the supper, and from above a ukelele throbbed in the persistent hands of young Mr. Jenks. The remaining guest, Mr. Dahlin, had long since disappeared through the gate in impressive array and with a large white box tied with gilt cord beneath his arm.

"Nothing ever happens around here," Miss Busby chattered on. "I've taught school in Riverboro going on six years and you can't think how monotonous it gets! There is always something to make life interesting in the sort of place you come from, even if it's a crime or a scandal but here we never even have a big enough fire to stir up excitement."

"Riverboro had its share of crime and scandal, too, a few years ago, didn't it?" Paul asked carelessly. "I was talking to President Coe of the Municipal Bank to-day, and he told me what had happened to its predecessor."

"Oh, hush!" Miss Busby glanced nervously over her shoulder. "We—we never speak of that here. Mrs. MacNab ordered out the last young man who had your room because he said Zenas Prall ought to have been tarred and feathered. You see, Mrs. MacNab used to be Mr. Prall's housekeeper, and her mother before her, and when he took all that money and got found out she tried so fiercely to defend him that some folks thought she stood in with him. I guess she was watched very closely for a year or two after, to see if she showed any sign of prosperity that couldn't be accounted for, but she is as honest as the day."

"I thought it was understood that Prall lost all the money he embezzled in speculation," remarked Paul.

"Well, you hear so many rumors," Miss Busby responded evasively. "I was boarding at the other end of town when it all happened, and didn't even know Mrs. MacNab, so I wasn't particularly interested."

"But wasn't there some scandal, too, of another sort?" Paul insisted. "It seems to me I remember that some woman was mentioned in connection with the case."

He turned slightly and glanced up, but it was too dark for him to see her face.

"I don't think so," she disclaimed. "At least I never heard of any. Mr. Prall was a confirmed old bachelor, deacon in the church and head of the Civic Improvement Society; he was just money mad, I guess. Oh! There's that man again!"

A slouching figure had emerged from the deeper shadows at the end of the lane and strolled slowly toward them with shoulders hunched and hands deep in pockets.

"Who is he?" Paul lowered his voice. "What is he doing here?"

"I don't know!" returned Miss Busby in a whisper. "He's

been hanging about every night for over a week now; I met him right by the gate in the dark when I was coming home from church and he looked at me so intently that he frightened me. He is a foreigner, I think; Hungarian or Italian."

The man had drawn nearer and they sat in silence until he had passed with a keen, furtive glance at the porch. He slouched on into the shadows once more.

"He might be a mill or factory hand, to judge by his appearance," Paul suggested. "They employ a lot of foreign labor, do they not?"

"Yes." Miss Busby shivered a little. "If he is, though, I can't see what should bring him away out here, nor why he should loiter about until far into the night. I saw him long past midnight when I got up to close my window. Sometimes another man meets him at the head of the lane and they walk together; they don't seem to know anyone in any of the houses along here, or try to speak, but they just watch and watch until it is positively uncanny! It started while Mrs. MacNab was away, and when she returned and I told her she wouldn't believe the man was really hanging about until she saw him herself. Then she had nothing to say."

"So Mrs. MacNab deserted you?" Paul asked lightly.

"For a few days. She went away on a visit more than a week ago and came home last Thursday.—Here comes that man again! What do you suppose he wants?"

This time the loiterer was on the opposite side of the lane and shambled by without quickening or retarding his gait.

"I feel as if he were watching us!" Miss Busby shivered again nervously and rose. "I must go in; I have some tiresome examination papers to correct. Goodness! I shall

be as glad as the children when this term is over! Good night, Mr. Harvey; don't smoke yourself to death!"

Left alone, Paul ground out his cigarette stub in the tub of azalea and sauntered down to the gate where he stood in the shadow of a budding lilac bush. The cottages on the other side of the lane glowed cheerily with lights, all save the one directly opposite, which loomed blackly against the lesser darkness of the sky. Paul recalled vaguely that he had observed a sign of some sort amid the neglected tangle of the garden when he had returned with his bags that afternoon.

He waited quietly until shuffling footsteps approached once more and carefully calculating his time, he stepped forward suddenly from the shadows and flung open the gate, confronting the man. The latter leaped nimbly aside with an oath, his hand slipping suggestively to his pocket.

"Have you a match about you?" Paul asked calmly, displaying the unlighted cigarette between his fingers.

The man drew a quick breath.

"Si, signor!" He spoke in rough, surly tones, but produced a match with alacrity, and striking it on the fence, held it close to Paul's face, peering at him with sunken, eager eyes.

By its light his own countenance was revealed, swarthy, gaunt and almost wolfish in its fierce intensity. For a moment he gazed and then before the match flickered out, Paul saw the tense, menacing light fade in his eyes and a look of sullen disappointment take its place.

He gruffly refused the cigarette which the detective offered and was turning away with a muttered "good-night" when Paul stopped him.

"You are not a neighbor, are you? You're waiting for someone?"

The Italian wheeled again quickly, but for a moment made no reply. Then, with a hoarse chuckle which seemed half a snarl, he responded:

"*Si!* I wait-a for a frien'! Dis street-a free, no? I wait-a till he come."

Giving his interrogator no further opportunity for speech he shuffled away into the darkness and Paul with a shrug turned and entered the house. Whatever the man's design, his tone boded ill for the "friend" of whom he had spoken. Paul recalled the conductor's observation that the life of Zenas Prall would not be worth "a plugged nickel" if he dared return to the scene of his crime. Was it for him the Italian waited?

Going to his room Paul busied himself with unpacking and arranging the contents of his bags and was unrolling a pair of shoes from the newspaper in which he had wrapped them when there came a tap upon his door, accompanied by the tinkle of ice in a pitcher. Mrs. MacNab's approaching footsteps had been noiseless even to his trained ear.

"Come in!" he called.

"I've brought you some water, sir, and a latch-key," Mrs. MacNab announced. "The bath is at the end of the hall, and if you want to be called in the morning——?"

"Thanks, but I'm an irregular riser," Paul smiled. "The people I've come to this town to see cannot be approached before noon and I may sleep late. Don't bother with breakfast for me, please, Mrs. MacNab."

But the woman seemed scarcely to have heard. She was gazing at the Eastopolis newspaper which had dropped at his feet. Every vestige of color and expression was swept suddenly from her face, leaving it ashen and blank. Paul followed her eyes mechanically and all but started himself, for from the printed page there smiled up at him the deli-

cate, spirituelle face of Mrs. Hartshorne. It was the first photograph he had seen of the murdered woman and was evidently a reproduction from a snap-shot taken as she descended the steps of St. George's Church, possibly after a wedding or some special service. The press photographer had caught her in an unguarded moment with the sunlight beaming softly upon her face and the impression was unusually clear and lifelike. Above it was the caption: "Only known photograph of the slain woman."

Mrs. MacNab stooped and picked up the newspaper.

"Is that the woman who was killed in your town last week?" she asked in a peculiarly repressed tone. "What was her name? Hartshorne?"

"Oh, the Hartshorne case?" Paul responded carelessly. "Yes, I've been too busy to read up much about it. It must have been a terrible affair, though; and I don't think they have found a trace yet of the murderer."

Mrs. MacNab did not reply at once. The paper trembled slightly in her hands. As if to conceal its agitation she crossed to the gas bracket in the wall and stood beneath its flare with her back turned to him.

"So that's the woman!" she repeated at length. "I never thought——."

She caught herself up abruptly and Paul asked:

"Did you know her, Mrs. MacNab? You seem surprised——"

The woman wheeled upon him, the paper instinctively crushed in her hands.

"How should I, Mr. Harvey? I've never been to Eastopolis! I read about the murder, of course, but I thought she'd be a different kind of woman; not so innocent and ladylike appearing as this! And they've no idea who killed her?"

"If they have, it hasn't been given out." Paul shrugged and dismissed the subject. "What time is the mail delivered, Mrs. MacNab?"

She replied mechanically, bade him "good night" and departed with the newspaper still clutched in her hand, while Paul completed his preparations for the night and extinguishing the light, seated himself at his opened front window.

The emotion which his taciturn hostess had displayed was too patent to be ascribed to mere morbid curiosity, her astonishment too marked and too quickly followed by apprehension to have been caused by the death of an unknown woman in a strange city. News of the murder of a "Mrs. Hartshorne" had not impressed her, but the pictured face of the victim had produced a shock which she had been unable to conceal effectually. Sheer accident had tended to confirm Paul's belief that this was no blind trail upon which he had started, but the way was dark before him. A revulsion of feeling came, a self-distrust which had dogged him in more than one previous case.

What had he, after all, to go upon in attempting to connect the liberated embezzler with the murder? There was not one definite point of resemblance between the police description of Zenas Prall and the aged man whom Rose Adare had observed at the funeral, or the face which had stared into that of the kitchen maid at the basement window of the house on Farragut Street. Had he not been over eager to read into Mrs. MacNab's amazement a confirmation of his hastily formed theory?

The ukelele had long since been silenced and the boots of Mr. Dahlin had squeaked their way to his room, but Paul still sat lost in reflection. His room was at the corner of the cottage, with windows facing front and at the side and

from his point of vantage he could see the empty cottage across the way. It stood out distinctly beneath the moonless but clear, starry sky. As he watched, it seemed to him that two shadowy figures moved and merged in the cavernous blackness of the porch.

He strained his eyes, but no further sign of human presence resulted. After an interval he crossed to the side window and glanced out. The cottage next door was dark and silent, but from a window on the first floor of his own abode at the rear, a thin, flickering, yellow gleam, like a trembling, beckoning finger reached out across the patch of garden.

Even as his eyes rested upon it, however, it was extinguished, and, forswearing further idle speculation, Paul threw himself upon his bed.

How long he slept he did not know, but all at once he found himself sitting bolt upright with every nerve tense and vibrantly awake. Through the window he could see that the stars had dimmed and a light breeze heralded the faint grey rift in the eastern sky.

He listened intently, but for long minutes no sound broke the stillness of the sleeping house, and he was on the point of relaxing again with disgust at his own state of nerves when a muffled, half-suppressed groan came to him from somewhere below.

Springing softly from the bed he threw a bathrobe about his shoulders and, creeping to the door, placed his ear against the keyhole. Someone was slowly and laboriously ascending the stairs; the stumbling, hesitant footsteps mingled with a warning creak of the boards and a crackling snap which told of sudden strain upon the flimsy stair-rail.

The footsteps passed his door and mingled with them Paul fancied he detected a dull, subdued, swishing sound as of

woolen skirts, and a single convulsive sigh. He strained his eye through the keyhole, but only blackness met his eager gaze as the footsteps died away and utter silence reigned.

Half an hour dragged by and a clock somewhere in the lower regions of the house boomed four heavy, precise strokes before Paul's vigil was rewarded and he caught once more that subdued swish against the stair rail.

This time he did not hesitate, but flung the door wide and stepped out into the hall, confronting the gaunt, ungainly figure of Mrs. MacNab which, swathed in a shapeless wrapper, shrank back against the wall.

"Who is it?" he asked abruptly.

"It's just me, sir." His landlady's voice was sullen and resentful. "Did I disturb you? You're a light sleeper, Mr. Harvey."

"Is anything the matter?" He ignored her comment. "I thought I heard someone groan."

"No matter except that I've a raging toothache!" she retorted shortly. "I went downstairs awhile back for some hot water and I'm going again now. It's enough to make a body groan! If you hear any noises it'll only be me, Mr. Harvey."

Without waiting to heed his expression of sympathy she stalked off down the stair and Paul closed his door. He returned to his bed, but sleep did not come to him again until broad day.

When his fellow-lodgers had departed and a neighboring school-house bell had ceased its tolling, he rose and descended to the ground floor, pausing for a moment to gaze out the screen door which opened upon the porch. The cottage across the way, although obviously empty, bore no sinister aspect in the bright morning light. It was in perfect repair, painted a cheerful yellow, and the garden was

gay with early spring flowers. The shadowy figures which had loitered about it in the darkness seemed incongruous, beyond the bounds of reality. With a shrug Paul sauntered into the dining-room.

His place was laid at the table, with a bowl of fruit and pat of butter before it, but no one was visible. Moving to the kitchen door, he swung it open.

Mrs. MacNab was standing by the table, upon which stood a large market basket. She was packing it as if for a picnic with a varied assortment of edibles, which were grouped before her. Paul noted a cold chicken, half a ham, pies, cakes, a jar of preserves and at one side a loosely tied bundle of candles and box of matches.

The woman glanced up, met his curiously inquiring gaze and stiffened.

"Good morning, Mr Harvey, I didn't hear you. I'll bring your breakfast right away if you will sit down at the table."

"There is no hurry," he protested mildly. "Are you going on an outing?"

"Just to a poor family a little way out in the country." There was guarded impatience in her tone and she added with patent eagerness. "You will want to get on down town, won't you? Your coffee's on the stove and I'll fry an egg in two minutes. You'll find the morning paper on the hall table."

Paul accepted his virtual dismissal and withdrew. The Riverboro paper contained two Eastopolis paragraphs which caused him to forget for the moment the scene in the kitchen. The first was a brief one relative to the Hartshorne case, stating in effect that new and startling evidence was in the possession of the authorities and that sensational disclosures might be expected at any time. The second was in marked

contrast to the ambiguity of the first; it presented a detailed account of the arrest of Cornelius Swarthmore in a neighboring seaport on a grave Federal charge.

Mrs. MacNab brought his simple meal and while he consumed it hovered anxiously about in an evident desire to hasten his departure from the house. There was no visible sign of the toothache of which she had complained, but her eyes were sunken and heavily ringed and her face looked haggard and years older than on the previous day.

She followed him out to the porch and when half way down the lane he turned she was still standing there watching him.

In plain sight Paul boarded a car bound for the center of town, but alighted at the first intersecting street and walked quickly back and beyond the head of the lane to the next cross road. He followed it parallel with the lane until he came to a pleasant house set well back in an orchard, through the blossoming branches of which he could see the rear of the empty, deserted cottage.

A young woman with a child clinging shyly to her skirt was pumping water from a well nearby and Paul approached her, hat in hand.

"Would you mind if I walked through your orchard to the garden of that unoccupied place?" he asked, with an ingratiating smile. "I live on the next lane and I would like to take a short cut."

The young woman smiled, too, and nodded.

"Go right ahead," she said. "That cottage belongs to my sister and there's a gate cut through the fence at the back."

Paul thanked her and proceeded on his way, but when he had passed through the little wicket gate he kept well in a line with the rear of the cottage so that no curious eye

from his point of vantage he could see the empty cottage across the way. It stood out distinctly beneath the moonless but clear, starry sky. As he watched, it seemed to him that two shadowy figures moved and merged in the cavernous blackness of the porch.

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She turned and trudged wearily into the house and Paul smiled to himself as he gathered up the plans he had borrowed two days before. As she paused beside him he had noted beneath the dust upon her boots a sub-layer of charred cinders and across the sleeve of her grey cloak a long smudge of black.

Miss Busby was the only one of his fellow boarders who returned for dinner, but the school claimed her again immediately after and Paul spent a long afternoon in the inaction of pending events which so tried his soul. He could not take the initiative and force an issue lest he precipitately defeat his own ends; and he must wait passively for developments to shape themselves and the waiting bred once more the old doubt and distrust. These were precious days to waste if, with his present objective achieved, he should still find himself no nearer the solution of the mystery.

The little teacher was not in evidence that evening and Paul had undisputed possession of the porch until, the supper dishes finished, Mrs. MacNab joined him. She made an obvious effort at conversation but the phrases came haltingly from her unaccustomed tongue and at length she gave up further pretense and sat staring down the lane in eager, troubled anticipation.

"Are you expecting anyone?" asked Paul.

He spoke quietly, but at the suddenness of the question his landlady started nervously.

"Oh, no, I—have you noticed anyone loitering about, Mr. Harvey?"

"Not now, but last night," he responded. "There was an Italian who seemed to be patrolling the lane."

"How do you know he was Italian?" Mrs. MacNab asked in unguarded anxiety.

"I had a little talk with him." Paul eyed her blandly as though surprised at her interest. "He appeared to be a rough sort of individual for this neighborhood and I asked him what he was doing here; he told me he was waiting for a friend."

Mrs. MacNab shivered a little and drew her crocheted shawl closer about her thin shoulders.

"I don't know who he can be," she murmured. "If he hangs around any more I'll speak to the policeman the next time I meet him. Not that I've anything anybody would steal, but I don't like the notion of foreigners prowling about. I—I don't see him to-night."

The tone in which she added the last sentence belied her words in its unconscious wistfulness; it was almost as if she would have welcomed the presence of the nocturnal watcher. Paul laughed shortly.

"He is on hand, nevertheless. He dodged around behind that empty cottage over the way just as you came out on the porch; the friend for whom he is waiting must be a procrastinator.—There he is! Can you see him now, under that cherry tree at the back?"

The tree, a mass of snowy blossoms, loomed ghostlike in the darkness and as he spoke a shadow moved beneath it.

Mrs. MacNab nodded and sat back in her chair.

"I doubt that he's aught but a harmless lunatic," she observed. "Still he should not be at large to worry householders . . . How long are you planning to stay in Riverboro, Mr. Harvey?"

Paul made a non-committal rejoinder and the conversation flowed on in desultory fashion for another half-hour before Mrs. MacNab rose.

"I'm going to bed myself," Paul volunteered. "I have

an early appointment to-morrow and a big day before me. Will you wake me at seven, please?"

She agreed and Paul went to his room, where he extinguished the light and placed himself at the window as on the night before.

The shadow beneath the cherry tree across the lane shifted, and presently Paul saw a dark figure climb over the padlocked gate and take up once more his stealthy patrol.

Miss Busby returned, escorted by a tall and deliberate youth who took protracted leave of her at the porch steps; then the two clerks reappeared and sought their rooms and in an hour complete darkness and silence had fallen over the household. A glance from the side window showed that no candle burned in the kitchen to-night and Paul began to grow uneasy. What if his vigil were to go unrewarded and another day of waiting ensue?

The clock somewhere below struck midnight and as its final note died away a single crunching step on the gravel path brought Paul to the front window once more. Mrs. MacNab in her long, gray cloak was moving swiftly to the gate, her feet making no sound upon the grass border of the path save that one misstep which had sounded the warning.

Paul seized his coat and hat and slipping down the stairs, softly opened the front door. Mrs. MacNab herself had vanished, but as he drew the door shut behind him he beheld the figure of the Italian, bent low and hugging the shadow of the hedge, steal by swiftly on the opposite side of the lane. Waiting only until he had passed on a few yards, Paul followed, and a strange procession began.

They were moving away from the trolley line in the same direction in which Mrs. MacNab had driven off that morning. She walked swiftly without glancing back. Beneath

the arc-light at the intersection of the road ahead she crossed and disappeared into the shadows once more, with the Italian doggedly at her heels and Paul bringing up the rear, one hand resting significantly in his coat pocket.

For a mile or two they progressed steadily, while the closely bundled cottages gave place to broad stretches of open fields with patches of woods between and here and there a farmhouse, dark and silent beneath the clouded, brooding night sky. The Italian neither hurried nor slackened his pace, but maintained a uniform distance between himself and his quarry, until a dense tract of woodland loomed before them and a sharp turn in the road hid the foremost figure from view. Then the second broke into a shambling run and with almost incredible swiftness, considering his infirmity, Paul closed in on him.

The Italian heard his approach and wheeled upon him with something upraised above his head which gleamed even in the darkness. He essayed to leap upon his adversary, but Paul dodged agilely and the hand which had rested in his coat pocket flashed up and then downward, bringing the butt of his pistol with crushing force upon the other's head.

The Italian swayed and crumpled to the roadway where he lay motionless, the long, slender knife slipping from his grasp. Paul pocketed it and unceremoniously rolled the unconscious form into the concealing underbush. For a moment longer he waited, but no sound came from the thicket and, satisfied, he turned and made off around the bend in the road.

Mrs. MacNab had vanished, but a faint light sputtered where the woods ended abruptly in the stubble of an overgrown, neglected field and the gaunt skeleton timbers of a house which had been partially consumed by fire reared

themselves against the lesser darkness. The light wavered among the ruins and vanished abruptly, to be revealed a moment later silhouetting the open square of an unshuttered window.

It appeared that one wing of the house had remained comparatively intact and Paul made his way quickly over the rough, uneven ground and peered in at the aperture. The room was large and had evidently been the kitchen, for a rusty stove stood in one corner and strings of herbs festooned with cobwebs hung from the low rafters. Across a chair were flung a woman's gown and hat, its veil sweeping the floor.

Mrs. MacNab stood beside the rickety table, her candle raised above her head and her solicitous gaze fixed upon a couch against the wall where beneath a heap of blankets something stirred and muttered. Behind her a door yawning crazily upon one hinge showed the means by which she had gained entrance. Paul dodged from the window and crept noiselessly around through the charred debris until he reached its embrasure.

The candle had been placed upon the table and Mrs. MacNab was bending over the couch when, as Paul ventured beyond the sill, a traitorous board creaked beneath his foot.

She straightened with blanched face and furious, blazing eyes.

"What do you mean by following me here?" she demanded in a low shaking voice. "How dare you spy upon me!"

"The Italian followed you," Paul responded with his eyes fastened upon the couch. "He had a knife in his hand and had almost caught up with you when I came upon him."

Mrs. MacNab shrank back.

"Where is he?" she whispered.

"Lying in the ditch around the turn in the road. He won't trouble you again."

"Well," she drew a deep, tremulous breath. "I'm mightily obliged to you, Mr. Harvey, but you shouldn't have followed me here. Please go straight back and don't ask any questions or—or say a word to anyone."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. MacNab, but I'm not going back until I have learned the truth. I have come all the way from Eastopolis to ask Zenas Prall how the woman known to us as Mrs. Hartshorne came to her death."

Mrs. MacNab gave a sobbing gasp and backed against the couch, her thin, angular arms outspread protectingly, but a waxen, ghastly face surmounted by a lock of straggling white hair rose wraith-like from amid the blankets, and a broken, husky voice cried:

"It wasn't I! She fell before my eyes, but I didn't kill her! Good God, my last hope died with her! My last hope!"

"Your last hope of what, Mr. Prall? You had better make a clean breast of it now." Paul spoke not ungently, for the wreck of a man before him seemed hovering upon the verge of dissolution. A greyish pallor had overspread his deeply lined face and he sank back gasping, with one claw-like hand tearing at his side.

"You're killing him!" moaned Mrs. MacNab fiercely. "Couldn't you give him the last few days in peace?—Don't try to answer him, Mr Prall! The law can't touch you now!"

"I—I must." The man upon the couch struggled to sit upright. "Get off—mind, Margaret! Nothing else—matters, now!"

of it she stood and laughed maliciously with her lips curled back from her teeth. Still laughing she glanced up and met my eyes. I've told you the rest."

He sank back wearily once more, but Paul prompted him.

"Not quite all. What did you do when you saw her fall?"

"I don't know," responded Zenas Prall feebly. He was weakening fast, but he waved away the cup which Mrs. MacNab would have held to his lips. "No more, Margaret. I've strength enough to finish.—A sort of unreasoning terror seized me as if in some way my look had struck her to the earth. Somehow I got out of that garden and back to my lodgings. I was wretchedly ill the next day and the afternoon papers with their account of the murder gave me the final blow; I fell into a fever and only the fear of what I might reveal in my ravings gave me strength to combat the delirium. But I was dazed and half out of my mind, as it was.

"On Monday I dragged myself to the funeral, but somehow I could not realize even then that my last hope was gone. I felt as if I could tear the casket apart and force her dead hands to give me back the money which I had stolen for her. I stood beside her bier with my hand upon it, when an usher came and led me away.

"It was all over! I realized that night that the end had come for me. I would have gone then, I think, but for the overmastering longing which possessed me to die here, in my own place. There was one loyal soul in all the world who would take me in, I knew, and so last night I came—Margaret, what time is it?"

"After two, Mr. Prall," she responded in a choked voice.

"I'll go at dawn," he murmured sleepily. "Margaret, it's —it's good to be home!"

"Mr. Prall!" The younger man bent over him swiftly.

"Who was the man you employed to trace Mrs. Hartshorne? Tell me! What was his name?"

"Name?" he repeated vaguely. "Oh, you mean Carmichael? He was head—New York agency. Died two months ago; pneumonia. Told you all, now. Must—rest——"

The mumbling whisper ceased and the lids fluttered down over his tired eyes. Only his labored breathing told that he still lived. Paul leaned toward his fellow watcher and uttered a single word.

"Doctor?"

Mrs. MacNab shook her head violently with a gesture of hopelessness and Paul settled himself to his vigil.

It was not long protracted. The harsh, rasping breath grew fainter and as the first pale streaks of dawn lightened the sky it ceased so imperceptibly that it was only when the tired eyes opened in what seemed calm content that they knew Zenas Prall had passed to a higher Tribunal.

Chapter XX.

THE TORN CARD.

'LATE on Friday evening Paul sat closeted with Chief Burke at Headquarters once more, reporting in detail his visit to Riverboro and its unexpected result.

"Not so unexpected, though," he qualified. "It's odd, but I had an instinctive sense of doubt that when I did locate Prall he would prove to have been the murderer. After I had seen Mrs. McNab drive off with that veiled, tottering old figure in the buggy I went in and searched the house. But I found nothing conclusive, barring the fact that although there were only five occupants, a sixth room—a very small one up under the eaves—had certainly been slept in the night before. That proved conclusively that the stranger had not arrived in the carriage while I was reconnoitering, but had come stealthily just before the dawn when I heard that labored ascent of the stairs.

"I went downtown then, interviewed Coe of the Municipal again, saw the Chief of Police and presented your letter. And I learned among other things that Prall had risen from humble stock and that his birthplace, situated a few miles out of town, had only recently been destroyed by fire.

"That Italian who lurked about—Tony Caputo—was one of the depositors who had been ruined when Prall wrecked the old Riverboro, as I learned later, and Mrs. MacNab, as well as I, knew that he must have heard of Prall's re-

lease and was watching and waiting to do for him if he showed up. If it were indeed Prall who had come in the night and been smuggled out dressed in Mrs. MacNab's old clothes, it occurred to me that the old farmhouse where he was born, provided enough of it still stood to afford shelter, would be the likeliest place where she would secrete him.

"When Mrs. MacNab returned and I saw the charred cinders ground into her boots and the smudge on her sleeve I was sure I had guessed right; but I couldn't approach the place in daylight for fear the old man would take alarm and get away. Mrs. MacNab led me there herself last night."

"There is one thing I want to know." The Chief grinned. "Did you kill the Italian?"

"Caputo?" Paul's eyes twinkled. "No, he is only the worse for a sore head; he showed up at a hospital himself before I could send out after him. Mrs. MacNab told me her side of it all after Prall's death. She has a strong sense of duty and she had stuck to her employer through thick and thin. She even went to Atlanta for him on hearing that he was to be released, but he managed to elude her in order to carry out that crazed plan of his. She was the only one who had known of his infatuation for the woman who called herself 'Alma Horton', and suspected that she was the main cause of his downfall. She had seen them together more than once and when she found that newspaper picture in my room of the woman who had been murdered here and recognized her, she was sure that Prall had killed her.

"She told me of her shock when he appeared that night, how frightfully he had changed during his imprisonment and how he convinced her of his innocence in connection

with Mrs. Hartshorne's death. But she realized that he would be accused and that at any moment we might be on his trail; that was why she dared not risk keeping him in her own house. The poor old creature is heartbroken now, but I think she is a bit relieved, too, that it is all over."

"And we've got to begin once more!" The Chief's smile had changed to a frown and he smote the desk before him. "In all the annals of the Department there has never been a case to equal this in pure cussedness! Who fired that shot, anyway? It's a cinch that it never came from the ball-room. Mrs. Cowles was eavesdropping in one corner of the conservatory; could someone else, unknown to her, have been hiding in another; or do you suppose she knows herself and is holding out on you?"

Paul shook his head.

"I'm convinced that she told me all she knew. I'm afraid we'll have to dig back further yet in Mrs. Horton—Hartshorne's past for the truth. It's a rotten stroke of luck that Carmichael—the private detective Prall employed to trace her—should have died; I'm going to take a run up to New York and see if I can get hold of any notes he may have made on the case. By the way, did Lumsden return yet?"

"This morning," the Chief responded. "You had the right dope, Paul; he traced all her jewels except a few minor pieces and found she had purchased every one of them in New York during that month before she came here, trading loose stones for them in some cases; and later examination showed surface scratches where those stones had been pried from their settings by a rank amateur. She meant to start her campaign with a clean slate, all right! You would never have thought, to look at her, that she would turn out to have been a con woman like that, copies

in old Prall. But those soft-spoken, ladylike ones with brains are always the worst!"

"I suspected from the start of our investigation that she was something more than a social grafter," observed Paul. "Do you remember when we examined the little secretary, Rose Adare, and she told us what well-kept hands Mrs. Hartshorne's were and how she had an odd trick of curling the little finger of her right hand? That was habit, an old trick of the professional card sharp. And she missed the long, pointed nail there; the nail that helped her to deal from the bottom of the pack. Later, when Mrs. Cowles mentioned Mrs. Hartshorne's peculiar luck at bridge, I was convinced. In their usual small-limit games she didn't try to put anything over, but when occasionally they played for very high stakes she took her hand off her number; couldn't resist the temptation of working her old tactics, in spite of the risk of losing all she had schemed for in coming here. And of course she won. Her way of living bore out my supposition, too; she didn't use a quarter of her income and kept enough money loose in the house to carry her far on a quick getaway. What have you done about Sadie Mullen?"

"What you asked, but it's sheer rot!" the Chief exploded. "She's got the makings of a first class crook in her, and some day she'll break out again and make more trouble for the Department if we don't send her up for a stretch. I've got what was left of her swag locked up with the rest of the Hartshorne's woman's loose coin, had Sadie up on a minor charge and framed it to have her paroled in Rose Adare's custody. I hope you'll remember, though, that you're here to round up crooks and convict them, not reform them!"

Paul smiled in perfect understanding.

"What about the French maid, Matilde?"

"She's out, of course, but I'm having her shadowed day and night and she knows it. If she tries to skip the town I'll have her run in, but she doesn't show any sign of such an intention."

"How is she living, and where?"

"She seems to have been a thrifty individual; has a drawing account of over five hundred dollars in one bank and nearly three thousand in the First National. She has gone to board with a seamstress named Ebers, at number eighty-three Cleveland Road, and sticks close to the house." The Chief pivoted about in his chair as Paul rose. "Where are you off to now?"

"Home to get some sleep," Paul responded. "I shall start for New York on the noon train to-morrow. Any instructions, sir?"

He added the last slyly and his colleague growled:

"Instructions? Surest thing you know! Bring in the man who killed Mrs. Hartshorne!"

Bright and early the next morning, when Rose Adare was preparing to start upon her daily round of calls, the door-bell rang and opening it herself she beheld Paul Harvey standing upon the threshold.

"Oh, it's you!" Her salutation was brief, but had it not been dark in the passageway the sudden deep flush which mantled her cheeks would have been plainly visible. "You're back, Mr. Harvey! What luck?"

"The best and the worst," he said lightly as he held out his hand. "You were awfully good to adopt my suggestion about the little Mullen girl. How is she getting along?"

"That's the funny part of it; she's doing splendidly!" Rose led him into the little front parlor. "Of course, she's

full of gratitude to me now, because she thinks I saved her from jail, but she's really taking an interest. I'm having her taught manicuring and facial massage. The creams and pastes and tonics are a lot more fun than dirty dishes. You can't blame Sadie for not liking that sort of work. She's getting over her screen-struck notions, and I'll make a beauty expert of her yet! She's in the kitchen now, putting up lip salve in jars. Do you want to see her? After all, it was you who saved her from paying for that one mistake and I—I think it was fine of you!"

It was Paul's turn to flush; but he turned her praise aside with a laugh.

"You are the one who is paying for it! I won't interrupt her labors, but I only hope she appreciates all you are doing for her. It seems as if I were continually asking favors of you, Miss Adare, every time we meet. Soon I shall be fairly swamped in my indebtedness to you!"

"Does that mean that you've got something more for me?" she cried eagerly. "The case isn't ended, then? You haven't found the murderer?"

Paul shook his head.

"Not yet. I'm afraid the motive lies far back in the past somewhere. We will have to find it before we can lay our hands on the man. I'm telling you this, Miss Adare, because I do want your help once more. I wish you would try very hard to remember if Mrs. Hartshorne never dropped a hint as to any possible experience she might have had before coming here; anything which might give us a starting point prior to last autumn when she dropped from the clouds, so to speak."

"I've been doing that ever since the murder," Rose declared. "Puzzling my head, I mean, to recall the least thing about her. Looking back now I can see how cautious

she was, but it struck me then as merely well-bred reticence. I've lain awake nights thinking over every bit of conversation I can remember having with her, and two or three little things have come back to me that you may be able to make something of, but they're awfully vague.

"Do you remember a month or so ago when the papers were full of the spring floods of rivers in the Middle West? I spoke of it when I was sorting her mail at the time, more to make conversation than anything else, and she nearly had a fit; she said she had had a frightful experience as a child and couldn't think of a flood even now without going into a panic. I cannot recall her exact words but I understood they had lived on a farm somewhere on the bank of a big river which overflowed and carried everything away. She was swept off downstream for two days clinging to the roof of a chicken house before the wreckage all got stuck in a jam and she was rescued.

"When I became interested and started to ask questions she shut up like a clam, but if you want to find out where she was raised you had better look up the big floods around thirty years ago——"

"Thirty!" Paul interjected. "Mrs. Hartshorne could only have been a baby then, if she existed at all!"

Rose smiled.

"I saw by the papers that even the coroner put her down as being between twenty-five and thirty, but I'd hate to be hanging since she was that age! Mrs. Hartshorne's manicurist told me once that in her line of business she had learned a lot of little infallible signs that give away the years as well as a birth-record could, and I learned from her one way of telling how old a woman is, that you can't go wrong on, and which even the statistic cranks haven't got hold of; that is by the number and depth of the little

lines across the finger joints. They are scarcely creased before twenty-five, but after that they seem to add about one a year and cut in deeper all the time; I'm speaking, of course, of the women whose hands aren't strained and drawn with toil. Mrs. Hartshorne was nearer forty than thirty, if you ask me!"

"What else did you recall?" asked Paul, amused by the ingenuity of her reasoning. "That is a point well taken, Miss Adare, and I will look into it."

"Well, maybe this is just foolishness on my part—to attach any importance to it, I mean—but in February a musical comedy that had been running in Chicago for over a year came down here to the New Gaiety. I went the opening night. The next day when I went to attend to some social correspondence for Mrs. Hartshorne, she mentioned a box party the Gaylors' had invited her to for that evening to see the show; 'The Maytime Maid', it was called. I was surprised, because she never went to a theatre or public place like that, but I told her how good it was and how the comedian had kept me in stitches of laughter. She seemed rather quiet and thoughtful, but I didn't think anything about it until I went late that afternoon to Mrs. Gaylor's on a hurry call to send out some invitations for a dinner, and she spoke of having received a last-minute note of regret for that evening's box party from Mrs. Hartshorne, and how it had upset her arrangements. I couldn't help wondering if something I'd said hadn't made Mrs. Hartshorne change her mind about going."

"Do you remember exactly what you did say?" Paul leaned forward.

"I only described the show in a general way and told her some of the novelties in the musical numbers," Rose replied. "I don't think I spoke of any of the people in it

except the funny man. She listened, but she wasn't particularly interested until I happened to mention his name, and then she seemed to come out of the clouds and asked me quite sharply to repeat it. It was right after that she grew thoughtful and absent-minded; I don' think she heard another word I said."

"What was this comedian's name?" Paul's tone had quickened.

"I don't remember." Rose shook her head. "You see, it was fresh in my mind then from reading it in the programme the night before, but I forgot it, quickly. He played the part of a bush league pitcher masquerading as an English lord, and he had dreadfully funny legs! It seems silly, doesn't it, for me to have fancied his name meant anything to Mrs. Hartshorne?"

"Not 'silly'," Paul remonstrated. "Remember, I want to know everything, no matter how trivial it may seem to you."

"Well, there is only one thing more," she announced after a pause. "It happened in February, too, about the last of the month. I had just finished Mrs. Hartshorne's letters when Jenny brought a card up to her. It was early dusk, but I could see plainly the look which came over her face. 'There is some mistake, Jenny,' she said. 'I don't know the gentleman.' "

"Jenny went away, but she came back in a minute or two with another card, a business one this time, with some writing scribbled on it. When she read it Mrs. Hartshorne sat as still as if she had been carved out of stone for the longest time, with her face turned away from me, while Jenny waited in the doorway. Finally she said she would be down in a minute, and for Jenny to show the gentleman into the reception room.

"She seemed to forget all about me being there, and I didn't say anything to remind her of my presence after I'd caught a glimpse of her face. She looked pale but mad, too, as though her fighting blood were up, and her eyes just flashed. She tore the card to pieces and flung it on the coals in the grate, twisted her hair up in a knot, slipped on a tea-gown and sailed off downstairs. I didn't hear a word of greeting and she shut the reception room door after her.

"I stood where she had left me until I saw on the hearth rug a bit of that torn card she had meant to burn. Without thinking, I stooped and picked it up to put it in the fire, when some words on it caught my eye. Honestly, Mr. Harvey, I hadn't any intention of reading them, they just jumped out at me somehow. It was the lower right hand corner of the card which had been torn square through the middle, so the top of the piece I held had engraved on it the last part of the man's name 'i-c-h-a-e-l.' At the bottom was 'i-v-e' in small letters, then 'Agency' with a capital, and 'I-n-c.' Between the two lines of engraving four words were scribbled in pencil, two on a line. 'Your interest' and right underneath it 'brier ring'. I remember it distinctly because it struck me as being so queer. Of course, the rest of the message must have made sense, but I couldn't for the life of me guess what a 'brier ring' was. I poked the scrap of paper down in the coals when the reception room door opened and Mrs. Hartshorne's voice, that was usually so quiet, reached clear up to me. "—absolutely uninterested," she was saying. "You've brought your wares to the wrong market! Your employers may take what steps they choose, but I shall have no dealings whatever with you.'

"The front door slammed and Mrs. Hartshorne came upstairs. She looked a little surprised when she saw me

and murmured something about being sorry to have kept me waiting, but 'a stupid man had been sent to her on a business matter.' I let it go at that, in my own mind, and thought no more about it until just the other night when it all came back to me. That 'ive Agency' must have been 'detective agency'; at least, I can't think of anything else it could have stood for."

Paul rose and held out his hand once more.

"Splendid! I told you we would make a real detective of you yet, Miss Adare! I'm off, now; leaving town again for a few days, but I'll look you up as soon as I get back, and I think that this time I will have some news worth hearing."

"Goodbye!" There was a note of wistfulness in her tones which was lost upon his preoccupation. "I—I hope you will be successful, Mr. Harvey."

Before he left town, Paul rang up his friend Mr. Glaub.

"Principal comedian with the 'Maytime Maid'? Feller with funny legs?" that gentleman repeated. "Sure I know him! He is Fred Sammis—'Frog' Sammis, we used to call him. Did contortion stunts in the Big Time years ago dressed as a frog, but he's made the hit of his life now in this production . . . Yeh, they're in New York, playing the Hudson Square Theater, and booked for an all-summer run. Say, what are you after Frog for?"

But Paul had hung up the receiver and Mr. Glaub's curiosity remained unsatisfied.

Chapter XXI.

THE WOMAN FROM FRENCH LICK.

THE JAMES W. Carmichael Detective Agency, Incorporated, was still listed in the New York telephone book, and an hour after he stepped off the train on Monday Paul presented himself at the office of the concern and sent in his name to the present head.

After some delay he was ushered into a spacious apartment, where from behind an imposing desk an undersized, rat-eyed individual rose with a pretense of affability and bowed.

"Mr. Carmichael died recently, I regret to say," he announced. "I'm Joseph Wemple, his successor. Take a seat, sir; what can I do for you?"

"You are carrying on the cases left unfinished at Carmichael's death?" Paul asked tersely.

"Certainly. We have all his notes and memoranda and I was in his fullest confidence, Mr.—er, Harvey." He glanced at the card before him, which bore no address or qualifying line to designate his visitor's business. "I don't —er, recall——"

"I've come about the little affair Carmichael was handling for Mr. Zenas Prall, of Riverboro, later of Atlanta," Paul explained.

The other stiffened in his chair.

"Mr. Prall is dead, also, and the case is closed," he blustered. "Who sent you here?"

"And the subject, the lady whom Carmichael was shadowing; she too happens to have died very recently," Paul remarked, ignoring the question. "But I suppose you are aware of that, if you read the papers."

"I know of the murder, of course, but that does not concern us," Wemple returned. "The case was finished and out of our hands before Mr. Carmichael's death. I must refuse to discuss it with you further unless you state why you have come to me."

"You say you were in Mr. Carmichael's fullest confidence? You were associated with him in this business and were fully conversant with his methods and operations?" insisted Paul with added firmness.

"I was." The little man's tone was uncertain, however.

"Then you know that the Horton—or Hartshorne—case was not quite completed at the death of your partner, Mr. Wemple. When did he die, by the way?"

"On March eighth." Wemple leaned forward in sudden ire. "Look here, I don't know what you are driving at, but you'd better get out of this office!"

"If I do, it will be to the District Attorney!" Paul drew himself up and his brown eyes flashed. "Why didn't you keep up your partner's game, Wemple? Why didn't you follow up that first blackmailing visit of his to Mrs. Hartshorne with another? The card he sent up to her containing the statement that it would be to her interest to see him in regard to the Greenbrier ring of grafters and gamblers with whom she had been associated was calculated to make her think Carmichael represented them instead of Zenas Prall. It failed to do the trick, but undoubtedly she would have come through in time——"

"Who the devil are you, anyway?" Wemple squirmed in his chair.

"I'm in charge of the Hartshorne case. I may add that the Chief of Police of Eastopolis has a very interesting line of information on the activities of your agency."

"He's got the wrong steer!" the little man declared hastily. "This concern is run strictly on the level now. I've made some changes since Carmichael's time. When I told you I was in his confidence, I meant only as far as his method of operating to arrive at a solution; I didn't stand in with any jockeying or dirty work he may have tried to pull! I'm running things straight!"

"In that case, you will probably be glad to co-operate with us," Paul remarked. "You have got Carmichael's record of the case? I want to learn from you what you know of the Hartshorne woman's movements since the Greenbrier Springs episode, who her associates were and what her origin. Here are my orders from the Chief."

"I can't give you any dope on her origin." Wemple pressed a button. "We were only employed to find her after she made that getaway, and keep her in sight until Prall could obtain his release. Timmons, bring me the papers on file under P-r!"

He added the last to the secretary who had entered in response to his summons. When the latter had departed upon his errand, he turned again to Paul with a note of anxiety underlying his surface cordiality.

"It will give me the greatest pleasure in the world to assist your department, Mr. Harvey! That's the stand I'm taking, right from the start! This office isn't going to work at cross purposes with the authorities for personal advantage and reputation; it's going to supplement 'em, that's all. I've got to live down the black eye Carmichael has given it, of course," he added virtuously. "You can tell Chief Burke from me that we're always at his service."

Paul smiled.

"Did you or Carmichael know to what use your client meant to put the information you obtained for him?"

"Prall? No, that wasn't our affair, but if you want a personal opinion, Mr. Harvey, I don't believe he killed her; his nerve was gone."

The secretary reappeared with a long envelope which he placed upon the desk and retired once more.

"Here we are!" Wemple sorted the papers with quick, nervous fingers. "Hum! The subject did some traveling since she left Greenbrier, and she cut loose from all her old crowd, too. She was in with the Jimmie Bayard bunch that were backing the Springs resort and running the games there; they backed her, too, to play old Prall for a sucker. But when she landed him she skipped without kicking in and they had to shut up shop and beat it, too. They were good and sore, and I guess that is why she kept on the jump for a year or two afterward. There was a rumor—although we couldn't verify it—that she had been a protegee of old Chris. Waterford, the king of them all, who owned a chain of gambling houses from coast to coast in his palmy days.

"Anyhow, Alma Horton first appeared at Greenbrier Springs in October, 1912. We got this dope from the chambermaid who took care of her suite. She must have had some sudden news that alarmed her a month later, for she packed up and left at an hour's notice and the girl said she acted as if she was afraid of her own shadow. She came back, though, in March of the following year, and it looks as though the Bayard crowd had spotted Prall as a come-on for her and tipped her off, for she didn't lose any time in nailing him. She must have been a fast worker or he was dead easy; the bank went under and he was

arrested before the end of the year, but she had already made her getaway.

"She left Greenbrier in November, 1913, for Philadelphia, staying at a quiet hotel there for a month and then going to a boarding-house in Lakewood until March, 1914, when she went to another select boarding-place in Atlantic City. After three months our operative there lost her, but we picked up the trail again and spotted her in August in a bungalow at Silver Lake, New Hampshire. In October she made a long jump out to the Coast and spent the winter doing the less frequented resorts from San Diego to Frisco. In May—this was 1915—she chased up to British Columbia and settled down in a cottage near Victoria, but she gave us the slip again in August and jumped back across country. We located her in October, in an exclusive apartment house in Boston. She stayed there for a solid year, making little trips around in the summer. In October, 1916, she went to Florida, and cruised around Tampa Bay until the following spring, when she took a camp up on Georgian Bay in Canada. In October she turned up at the Belmonde, in New York, and after a month she settled in Eastopolis. During all those years she went dead straight, never tried to turn a single trick and made acquaintances only among the most quiet, conservative people; in training for her Eastopolis campaign is how I figure it, planning to bury the past, get in right on old Prall's money and cop out a live one in swell society."

Paul shook his head.

"That may be, but she could have dug herself in in some sleepy old town and stayed there until she thought it safe to take the social plunge. Her first abrupt departure from the Greenbrier resort is significant, if your informant is to be depended upon, and she must still have feared some-

thing to keep on the move as she did later; but it couldn't have been Prall."

"No; she thought he would die in Atlanta, and she wasn't wise to us, either. But remember, the crowd she double-crossed were sore—Jimmy Bayard and his lot—and they wouldn't have stopped at much to get even." Wemple gathered his papers together and thrust them back into the envelope. "Anyway, that is all the dope we got on Alma Horton except that she went under half-a-dozen different names all beginning with 'H' until she hit New York last fall. If your Chief would like a copy of this memoranda—"

Paul cut him short with a refusal, stemmed the flow of profuse, cringing cordiality and took his departure. One salient fact stood out from the otherwise unimportant information he had frightened out of the tricky Mr. Wemple; some undoubted Nemesis had been on the trail of the woman from a period prior to her initial appearance at the Greenbrier Springs resort. Clinging doggedly through the years, this mysterious avenger had overtaken her at last in the Ledyard's conservatory.

The final curtain had fallen amid tumultuous applause at the Hudson Square Theatre that night and Fred Sammis, featured comedian of "The Maytime Maid" had drawn the first lung-filling whiff from his cigarette—in defiance of all rules—and balanced it upon his make-up box, when the call-boy brought a card to him.

"'Paul Harvey'? Now, who the—oh, 'sent by Nat Glaub', eh?" He ruminated aloud as he read. "I'll see him, Bob."

The young gentleman who presently appeared at the door of the dressing-room bore no earmarks of 'the' profession nor had he a journalistic air. The comedian eyed him

askance, although somewhat disarmed by his frank smile.

"Mr. Sammis, I've got a nerve to bother you, I know, but I want to locate someone and when I told Glaub about it he said you might be able to help me."

"What's the idea?" Sammis asked cautiously as he puffed once more at his cigarette and reluctantly ground it out beneath his eccentric, spiked boot. "Who's the party you're looking for?"

"A young woman I knew as Amy Howard," Paul replied mendaciously, "although I've reason now to believe that she answers to a few other names as well. She appears to be about thirty, but she may be older; when I described her to Glaub he laughed and told me he thought she might be an old friend of yours, but would say nothing more. She's a good looker, with a face like a nun except for a little v-shaped scar up near her temple, blue eyes, brown hair——"

"Say, what's your game?" the other interrupted him, his face strangely set beneath the make-up. "What are you after the dame for?"

"A little matter of three thousand dollars back and the copyright to my play!" Paul responded with a lively assumption of grievance. "If you can put me wise to her I'll be grateful, I can tell you. Was Glaub right? Do you know her?"

"The woods are full of pretty, blue-eyed, brown-haired baby dolls with their hooks out for an easy mark," responded Sammis evasively. "Where did you run up against her?"

"In Chicago, a couple of years ago," Paul lied glibly. "I had written a one-act dramatic sketch that was bound to be a sure-fire hit, but nobody could seem to see the great stuff I had in it. It was about——"

"Never mind the sketch!" interrupted the comedian apprehensively. "Get on with the plot. Where does the dame come in?"

"All right," agreed Paul with inward gratitude. "I was willing to produce it myself, but I couldn't get even a try-out. Then I met this Amy Howard and she convinced me that she had the talent and experience and influence to put it over if I furnished the capital. I gave her my play and two thousand dollars, borrowed another thousand for her, and I've never seen her since or heard of my play!"

"You're lucky, if it's the same dame as the one I knew," the other remarked, evidently satisfied of the dramastist's sincerity. "Were you stuck on her?"

"Well, I—she did have me going, but I didn't exactly fall for her." Paul hedged. "I say, have you got a date? Will you come out and have a bite with me and talk it over?"

"You, said something!" The comedian agreed cryptically as he flung down the make-up towel and reached for his clothes. "I'll be with you in a second. I can't tell you where to locate your 'Amy Howard' but I knew an Annie Halsey once who fits your description. That little game that was put over on you is right in her line."

Paul's face expressed disappointment, but a thrill of elation tingled through his veins. Could he be at last upon the track of Mrs. Hartshorne's past?

He waited, volubly lamenting his lost money and play the while, until they were seated in a nearby chop house with two frothy steins before them. Then he asked:

"How long ago did you know this Annie Halsey?"

"Seven years." Sammis' face darkened. "If it's the same girl, you got off cheap; you've got your self-respect left—and your nerve and a chance for a future. She took

all that away from a friend of mine—the whitest fellow that ever lived for all he was quick-tempered. He hit the toboggan right! I'd like to know where she is, myself; I owe her a few on my own account for breaking up the team and putting the best partner I ever had on the bum!"

He added the last observation with grim earnestness and a flash of enraged retrospection in his eyes.

"Who was he?" Paul asked. "How did she do it?"

"How do any of 'em get a fellow crazy about 'em, and drag him down in the dust?" retorted the other. "Jack Bennett his name was, and we were top-liners on the Big Time for three seasons solid; comedy rough-and-tumble stuff, but we worked up a specialty you couldn't beat in the business! Bennett and Sammis it used to be, and it would be Bennett and Sammis now, featured in the 'May-time Maid', if it hadn't been for that little she-devil! I get hot under the collar just to mention her, for Jack and I were like brothers until she came along. It hurts to think that I'm on top now, while he had to go down the line because of her! He was the last fellow in the world that you'd think would fall for a quiet, pale-faced little thing like she was, but she did for him."

"How?" repeated Paul.

"Married him. We were pulling down eight hundred a week then and Jack never dissipated in those days. Handsome, too, and didn't seem to know it; that was the best part of it. Not big and brawny, but slim and dark and supple, with olive skin and soft, black eyes—you know the kind! The women were all mad about him, but he never bothered much with any of them until we happened to lay off for a week in Chicago and went to French Lick to see what the Springs were like. There he met Annie Halsey.

"He was dippy over her from the start, although I tried to steer him off, for the resort was wide open and the crowd pretty swift. Annie was a swell dresser and posing as a society dame; but she seemed to stand in with the gambling element, although she was the cold-blooded kind and straight, as far as that went. Jack wouldn't listen to me, and she was crazy about him, too, so you see what chance I had! When our season closed he married her, and before six months passed she tired of him and showed herself in her true colors.

"She was crooked—crooked as they make 'em! It was born in her, I guess. Jack's little old four hundred a week wasn't pin money to her. She was forever hatching up schemes on people we met, from rooking at cards to blackmail, and trying to put them over. At first she thought she could make him stand in with her, but after she saw the way he took that, she played a lone hand and defied him. Jack loved her and stuck even after we found out that she'd been a silent partner in that gambling ring, roping in the suckers to be trimmed.

"He thought he could reform her, but meanwhile his work was falling off and at last, about five years ago, she left him flat. He still believed in her, though, believed in the good that wasn't there and waited for her to change and come back to him. Instead of that she framed up a case against him and divorced him and then the drink got him and he went to pieces.

"You never saw a fellow go down the line as quick as he did! Our act was canceled, of course, in spite of all I could do to keep him straight. So I worked out the season in one, for I wouldn't team up with anybody else,—trying to make him pull himself together. He couldn't do it, though. She'd taken the heart out of him. And within a

few months he disappeared, down and out. I never could find him again, so you see, young fellow, if your Amy Howard is the Annie Halsey I knew, you got off cheap!"

"Still, you don't know where I could reach her?" Paul insisted.

The other shook his head.

"I never heard of her again. either."

"It is tough about your partner," remarked Paul after a pause. "Perhaps he has gone back to his own people, though. Where did he come from?"

"I don't know. He never talked much about himself; but he had an older sister somewhere who worshipped the ground he walked on. I've seen some of her letters begging him to come home and I got an idea he had run away when he was a kid. I don't know where she wrote from."

"Do you remember her name?" asked Paul, beckoning to the waiter.

"Nothing more for me, old man; I've got to hit the hay! . . . No, I wouldn't know the name if I heard it again, and it won't do you any good to try to locate her or Jack. I don't think he ever let her know that he had married; he was waiting for Annie to brace up and run straight so he could be proud of her, and then when the bust-up came it was too late." The comedian shook his head lugubriously once more. "No, Mr. Harvey, if it was Annie who trimmed you, you'd better say goodbye to your three thousand and thank your stars it was no worse. If I'd been Jack I would have——"

He paused and clenched his hands as he rose.

"You would—what?" Paul watched him curiously.

"I wouldn't have let her make a bum out of me, ruin my work and my happiness and my life, and then laugh in my face and go on her way! I'd have killed her!"

Chapter XXII.

THE YELLOW STREAK.

FORMER Police Commissioner Phillips sat back in his chair and regarded appraisingly the youthful representative of his fellow official of Eastopolis.

"Glad to do anything I can for Chief Burke," he announced. "Your name is Harvey, you say? The greatest Police Commissioner Eastopolis ever had was named Alfred Harvey."

Paul flushed.

"He was my father. I didn't realize that he was known outside of his own territory, sir. He was proud of the Force, proud to be its Chief. And it was his greatest ambition that I should enter politics myself, even after—" he paused, biting his lip, and then went resolutely on, "after I was lamed. Chief Burke was good enough to give me my chance, anyway."

"How did it happen?" The Commissioner's keen old eyes softened with kindly sympathy.

"My accident? During a football game at college eight years ago." Paul smiled with a wistfulness untinged by any bitterness. "I have always been interested in the study of crime and its detection, and politics didn't appeal to me. Call it an idiosyncrasy, if you like, but I could not settle to any other profession. Every big crime that occurred fascinated me, and at last when I thought I saw the solution of a case which had evidently stumped the De-

partment, I went to Chief Burke and offered my se as a rank amateur. He accepted, because of my fa former reputation, I think, but events proved my the be correct. And since then he has called me in on s unique cases. Of course, it has been sheer luck——"

"And something more." The Commissioner tappe chair arm with his tortoise-rimmed glasses. "Chief I would never have put the Reuhl and Van Vrenken in your hands, my boy, to say nothing of this present a if he hadn't known the stuff there was in you. The H horne case promises to be one of the biggest we've h the East for years."

"It is in connection with that, that I have come to Paul responded. "Everyone knows, sir, how you cl up New York during your term in office, and stampe gambling by breaking up the ring who thought the you buffaloed. I want to get a line on one or two of th

"The boys weren't all bad," observed the Commiss tolerantly. "Some of them were straight enough an their games on the square, but I was out to put th on the city and I did it."

"Did you know Chris. Waterford?" asked Paul.

The Commissioner chuckled.

"I did—and liked him, man to man. No crooked was ever pulled in one of his houses; the fools who there to play trimmed themselves and he grew rich b his game was shut down all over the country."

"Where is he now?"

"Retired and living out in Chicago in a big place f the Lake. He's getting on in years now, as I am, a heard that he went blind some little time ago. But has old Chris. to do with the Hartshorne case?"

"Nothing, personally, but some of his former asso

may be in possession of information which will be useful to me," Paul replied. "Did you ever hear of any women working in with him? Making a play for rich men, likely patrons, and bringing them to one of his various establishments to gamble, getting their rake-off from the victims' losses?"

"They all did that." The Commissioner shrugged. "The proprietor of nearly every gambling house in the country has a staff, and you would be astounded at the class of women who augment their incomes in such a way; not women who frequent actual gambling houses, but the wide-open resorts and so-called private games. Chris. always encouraged his women friends, at a percentage, to introduce their acquaintances; but he gave them a square deal when they came and a run for their money, at least, and helped many a player out when he went broke."

"Did you know of any women associates of his, seven or eight years ago?"

"That was long after my time." The Commissioner shook his head. "I've been out of office more than fifteen years. I couldn't recall any of them now."

"How about Jimmie Bayard's crowd?"

"Broken up. They were comparative pikers and there is little profit in their operations in these times," responded the old man. "Jimmie himself went to Europe a short time before the war started and I haven't heard of him since; his associates drifted into more lucrative fields."

Paul rose and as an afterthought asked somewhat indifferently:

"Have you heard during the last few years of a woman who identified herself with their type of enterprise known as Annie Halsey?"

The Commissioner pondered for a moment.

"No," he said at last. "Chris. Waterford might know, though. He had a trained memory for faces and names and he kept in touch with all of his fraternity, great and small. He wasn't in Jimmie's class, you know; Jimmie was a plain crook, but old Chris. played the game differently and he was an artist in his line. He would be the one to give you the information you want, if anybody could. How is the case coming on, Harvey?"

"Slowly, but I'm beginning to see daylight, I think," Paul answered gravely. "I have a good physical description of the murderer and an idea as to the identity of a near relative of his, but I've got to substantiate it with proofs before I can bring any pressure to bear. Goodbye, Commissioner; thank you for seeing me."

"I'd like to have helped you, but I've been out of the running too long, I'm afraid," the Commissioner remarked as they shook hands. "You're young, with a future before you and the chance of a life-time in your hands. Good luck to you, Mr. Harvey!"

The fast express which bore Paul Chicago-ward that afternoon seemed fairly to creep, so great was his impatience. A brief visit must be paid to the old gambler to round out the details of his ultimate report to Chief Burke and then a longer journey lay before him; a journey vague in possibilities, impelled only by what Paul himself would have termed a "hunch", yet fraught, to his newly awakened optimism, with a rosy promise of successful termination. The self-distrust with which he had viewed his first theory that the motive for the murder lay between Beatrice Ledyard's jealousy and Cornelius Swarthmore's fear of exposure, and his later premonitory doubt that in Zenas Prall he had found the author of the crime had alike vanished from him with the new phase of the investigation.

A chance remark of the lugubrious comedian during their interview on the previous night had made clear to Paul much that had been obscure from the first, and provoked a train of thought so undreamt-of that he mentally gasped. Had he from the inception of the case ignored blindly what appeared now as its most glaring obvious clue or had he wilfully followed the line of least resistance and drifted on the crest of events which had practically presented themselves to his attention?

He was fatigued mentally and physically with the strain of the prolonged chase, but returning confidence and enthusiasm brought renewed strength and his journey's end found him in an aggressively buoyant mood.

The great stone house in which the retired gambler lived was flanked by the most aristocratic of neighbors and bore in its severe dignity no resemblance to the flamboyant establishments the proceeds of which had made its possession possible, nor did the erect, white-haired, austere gentleman who presently faced Paul in the somber reception-room conform to his preconception of Chris. Waterford's personality; but he plunged into his subject without hesitation.

"Mr. Waterford, I've come to you at the suggestion of an old acquaintance of yours, former Police Commissioner Phillips, of New York. He told me of your professional reputation for squareness and generosity in the conduct of your business and he said you would be able to give me the information I require, if anyone could."

The austerity vanished in the quick genial smile which lighted the older man's face and seemed to bring a glow even to the faded, vacant eyes.

"Phillips told you that, did he? He fought me hard in his time, but he always fought fair. Sit down, Mr. Harvey. You are from the Department yourself?"

"From Eastopolis," Paul amended. "The Chief of Police there is very anxious to learn what he can of a woman identified with the sporting world a few years ago. I understand from Commissioner Phillips that you have a marvelous memory for faces and names and in all probability you encountered the woman we are seeking. She was very quiet and refined in manner, with a delicate, almost spiritual face; medium height, brown hair, bluish-grey eyes with a small v-shaped scar near one temple——"

"Annie Halsey!" interrupted Waterford. His smile had disappeared and a stern expression gathered about his firmly molded lips.

"That was her name," Paul announced quietly.

"And she is in trouble at last?" the other asked, shaking his head. "I knew it would come sooner or later; I warned her! But the yellow streak was there from the beginning and she couldn't be on the level even with us. 'Quiet and refined in manner' was she? I paid for that refinement, Mr. Harvey; took her when she was a green, gawky, raw-boned country girl with nothing but that saintly face of hers to recommend her and had her educated and trained to pass for a lady. I had no altruistic motives; I saw possibilities in her which might have brought much patronage to my establishments and I put up the money as a good investment. It paid dividends, too, for a time, but she wasn't contented with the percentage she got from the house. She was avaricious to the point of mania. She stooped to every cheap trick of the trade to gain her ends. I'm glad you know from Phillips how I stood, but I'm not denying that my profession is over-run with grafters and welchers, and Annie learned from them fast. There are born crooks like that, you know, who would rather cheat than win on the level—and Annie was one of them."

"What do you know of her origin, Mr. Waterford? We want to get as complete a line on her as we can," Paul explained.

"I found her waiting on the table in a hotel in Peoria eleven years ago." The other laughed shortly. "She wasn't the florid, assertive type that hit you between the eyes, but there was an attraction, a charm about her that had everyone, from the drummers to the night clerk, crazy about her. I was always on the lookout for new material, a fresh face with brains back of it to bring increased popularity to my games, and I studied her. She told me that she had run away from a little farm near Galesville on the bank of the Mississippi where she was born, to travel and 'be a lady', and her early experiences hadn't daunted her. Annie Halsey was her real name, too; I made discreet inquiries before I proposed a business arrangement with her because I couldn't afford to have any complications crop up later.

"I figured that if, slatternly and ignorant and uncouth as she was, she could yet attract without effort the admiration she was receiving from all sides in that sphere, she would be a splendid asset to me when she had the proper schooling and learned how to make the best of herself. She was adaptable and clever, quick to pick up ideas and make them her own. I thought that three years would turn her out a big drawing card for me.

" I put my proposition up squarely to her and she jumped at the chance. As a matter of fact, I had underestimated her ability to learn, for it was less than three years when she was finished and ready for work. Two years in a convent in Canada and a few months' travel and grooming with the wife of a friend of mine and she was the daintiest, smartest little lady in the world!"

"Just what was her line of work, Mr. Waterford?" asked Paul.

"High-class stuff. She travelled around alone with a maid in style, had a bowing acquaintance with me, and whenever she landed a new admirer—and they came in droves—she'd steer him into a game. And the games were square, Mr. Harvey; don't make any mistake about that. I built my reputation on that fact, and it stands. No man was cheated under a roof of mine, and nothing compelled him to play unless he felt inclined. But my judgment had been good; Annie certainly had a way with her!"

"Things went on swimmingly for over a year, and then I noticed that Annie was pulling a few little stunts on her own that weren't in our contract and looked pretty much like blackmail to me. I warned her I wouldn't stand for it and she promised to drop the dirty work, but she had taken up with the crooked crowd on the sly to learn from them and she took to every cheap trick like a duck to water. Looking back now I wonder that she didn't try to double-cross me, but I think she had a certain amount of awe and respect for me, and knew she couldn't put it over. I wasn't afraid that she would marry or get herself tangled up in any fool love affair, for I thought I had gauged her character accurately and that she was too cold-blooded and avaricious to let a passing sentiment run away with her good sense.

"It came, though. I had forgotten that she was a woman, and when it hit her she fell for it hard. An impecunious actor, too, without enough to keep her in shoe-leather, but he was handsome in a dark, clean-cut sort of way and crazy about her. She was swept off her feet, but I knew how long it would last with a woman of her type and I couldn't hold her to our agreement. The

Devil himself couldn't, when she once made up her mind to do a thing, and I had to let her go.

"She married him—Jack Bennett, his name was—and I wasn't altogether sorry, for I had caught her working too near the deadline again; pulling a swindling trick, and I knew I would have to get rid of her if I didn't want trouble on my hands. When they once begin to go crooked they go quick and I couldn't afford to have the reputation of my game as a square one lowered by having her resort to just plain thievery!"

Paul controlled an impulse to smile at the other's virtuously indignant tone, and queried: "Did you run across her again after her marriage?"

"No, only once. She grew tired of him as quickly as she had become infatuated and led him a dog's life; she kept in touch with some of the crowd and I got the particulars from them. Finally she divorced him and the poor fool went off and drank himself to death somewhere while she drifted back into the game again. She came to me and offered to resume business on the old basis but I couldn't see her. I was afraid she would pull something that would get us both into trouble and I wasn't taking any chances. That was about five years ago, more or less, and she took up with Jimmie Bayard's crowd and began playing the liners and the swell resorts. I lost track of her completely after that, and never heard a word until to-day."

"This husband of hers; did you ever meet him?"

"Oh, yes. Likeable chap, enough; not the average lady-killer type, in spite of his good looks. He appeared to be superior to the line of work he was engaged in, too, and out of his class. There was something foreign about him, like the fellows you meet knocking about the continent, although his name was good, plain American."

"Have you any idea where he came from?"

"None. He might have been Italian or Spanish or South American or a mixture of all three, to look at him. I studied him to see what his game was when he first began trailing after Annie at French Lick, for you never can tell what these vice-crusaders will try to put over on you next when they are on an anti-gambling rampage. But he was dead on the level. I could see that it was his moods as much as anything else that first attracted Annie; he was dreamy one minute and fiery the next and she had been used to the airy persiflage of sports and men of the world for so long that the boy's very intensity awakened her curiosity and interest. I never heard him talk much about himself, but he was a lot too good for her; steady-going, didn't drink then, or touch the cards. I heard that he did some sort of acrobatic comedy work on the stage and he looked like an athlete in spite of not being husky.—But it was Annie about whom you wanted information and not her husband. I could tell you more about her if I had kept in with the old crowd, but I cut most of them out when I retired. Then my eyes went back on me and I've lived pretty much alone."

There was an unconscious note of sadness in the old gambler's tone, but no trace of self-pity, and Paul felt an impulse of genuine sympathy and understanding borne of his own physical handicap, slight as it was, but he held himself firmly to the issue before him.

"We have a fairly complete record of Annie Halsey's activities after she joined forces with the Jimmie Bayard crowd," he observed. "Did you ever hear any reference made to her sister-in-law, Jack Bennett's sister?"

"No; didn't know he had one," Waterford responded. "As I told you, I never heard anything about his people or where he came from. I've told you all I know and if it's

not a department secret—my man reads the newspapers to me, and I find that he skips a lot—will you tell me what you've got on Annie?"

"If you will answer one more question, Mr. Waterford." The younger man paused. "You said just now that when she left her husband, he went off and drank himself to death somewhere. Are you sure of that? Did you learn of his death from any authoritative source?"

"No, but he went all to pieces; drank his head off, lost his position on the stage and went down and out. One of Annie's old friends met him some months later and told me that he was a mere shadow of what he had been. I wanted to help him out and tried to find him, but he had disappeared. You can't want him for anything; he never worked with her on any crooked graft, I'll bank on that."

"Nevertheless, I do want him," Paul retorted.

The sensitive ear of the blind man caught the significance in his tone.

"What is it?" he asked sharply. "Has Annie tried to implicate him? What are you after him for?"

"For murder," Paul replied. "I am afraid he is implicated very gravely and without any effort on the part of the woman you call Annie Halsey. She is dead, Mr. Waterford, and I am looking for the man who killed her."

"Dead!" The other repeated aghast. Then a light of comprehension broke over his slightless eyes. "Eastopolis —the Hartshorne murder case! Poor Annie! I guess it was as good an end for her as any other, though I don't believe Jack Bennett had anything to do with it. So the rich Mrs. Hartshorne was Annie Halsey! Well, she played for high stakes, didn't she, even if she did hand out a crooked deal. She couldn't help it, I guess; the yellow streak was there!"

Chapter XXIII.

THE KNOCK UPON THE DOOR.

"JUST think, Miss Adare, it's three weeks to-day since poor Mrs. Hartshorne was killed!" Sadie Mullen glanced up at her new friend and then swiftly back to the manicuring implements she was sterilizing. Her thin face had rounded and the sullen defiance in her eyes had given place to a trustful, candid light; altogether she was a vastly improved young person since the time, only a fortnight before, when the Chief of Police had handed her over to the practical mercy of Rose Adare.

"I know, Sadie," the latter responded. "I was thinking of it just now and I don't see what keeps him away so long."

"Keeps who?" asked Sadie.

But Miss Adare, with a sudden color in her cheeks turned away abruptly without reply and after a moment Sadie went on:

"I should think they could find out who killed her; they found me quick enough when I thought nobody was on to me! Maybe we'll never know the truth of it!"

"I'm sure we will!" Rose declared. "He—the police won't quit until they have got the one who did it and I shouldn't wonder if the truth came out sooner than we dream of."

As if in answer, the entrance doorbell rang and Rose, waving Sadie aside, rushed to respond to it.

To the young man standing on the threshold her face was the most heart-warming spectacle his tired eyes could have gazed upon and as their hands met he voiced his thought simply, without formal greeting.

"Oh, but it's good to see you! I wanted to come before!"

"Did you just get back to town, Mr. Harvey?" There was a new and strange note of shy self-consciousness in her tone.

"Not an hour ago. I stopped in at Headquarters and then came straight to you; I promised you news on my return and I've brought it to you."

"Do you mean that you've found the murderer of Mrs. Hartshorne?" she cried. Then as they entered the little drawing-room and the sunlight struck his face she added: "Oh, but you have! I can see it in your eyes!—You look tired, too; almost worn out. Sit down, do, and let me get you a cup of coffee or something!"

"Thanks, no. I am tired, but it's the reaction I suppose. I think we've reached the solution at last, Miss Adare, although we haven't yet taken the man into custody and until we do I won't mention his name. I did not let the Chief know in advance of my return and he's out of town, himself; won't he back until this afternoon, but I think the case will be closed then. I only stopped in for a moment to tell you that without your help I should never have succeeded, and to thank you."

"Oh, Mr. Harvey!" Rose, abashed, averted her face. "What did I do, I should like to know?"

"You gave me the first real clue, on the very day after the murder was discovered when I met you outside Mrs. Cowles' home, do you remember? Only, I was too blind to see it, then. Later—the last occasion on which I saw you, in fact—you put me once more upon the track."

"I don't know what you are talking about!" she declared in all sincerity. "I wish you didn't have to stick to riddles, for I'm almost dying of curiosity! Would you—would you mind coming back and telling me, when it's all over, I mean, and you have rested a little?"

"Indeed I will!" Paul said heartily. "It is only your due, anyway, for the credit all beolngs to you." He paused and added mischievously, "You spotted the murderer first, although you didn't know it."

"I—what?" Rose gasped.

"You sat within a yard of him for an hour or more, and told me all about it."

"When? Where?" she cried "Heavens, if I had known!"

"At the funeral. Do you remember when Dr. Perrine was reading the service so impressively and someone behind you laughed aloud in derision? Remember the dark young man with the hard, bold, black eyes who stared at you from the pew back of yours when you turned?"

"You can't mean it was he!" she exclaimed. "How could he have gotten in the Ledyard's house and why should he have killed Mrs. Hartshorne?"

"I'll tell you all about it this evening; that is, if I may come to-night?" Her eyes gave him answer and he added hurriedly: "It's been a wonderful pleasure aside from the help you've given me, Miss Adare, to have had you working on the case in a sort of partnership with me. For a man like me, whose work means his whole existence, it is a rare treat to meet someone who takes an enthusiastic interest as you have done!"

But Rose did not seem to hear his praise.

"There are other things in life for a man, besides work," she said slowly.

"For a strong, well, active chap, perhaps, there are any

number of outdoor stunts; big game hunting and polo and all that. But I'm handicapped. They wouldn't even take me in the service, you know, because of my limp. Crime detection has always been a sort of hobby with me and now I have made it my life-work. The mere social game never appealed to me and since my accident at college I've always been shy with girls; can't play tennis or dance very well, you know, and I have rather shut myself up with my books and criminological studies." His eyes had clouded, although he strove to speak lightly, and his smile was none too mirthful. "My father intended me for politics, I was inclined at first to a strenuous outdoor life, but fate has made of me an investigator into the life secrets of my fellow human beings."

The girl's eyes had grown misty.

"Like me," she said simply. "My father was a college professor and he wanted me to become a great writer. I am—of other people's letters. I know I am frightfully slangy, but it is a habit adopted in the beginning in sheer protest against fate. My father died, my stories wouldn't sell and I had to take up this. But you—you shouldn't shut yourself away from everyone, Mr. Harvey, just because of—of that slight accident. There is so much in life, so much fun and warm companionship and happiness——"

"There would be all of those things if there were someone to share them with." He had come very close to her. "Someone for a fellow to bring his triumphs to, and his failures; someone who wouldn't mind if he limped a little beside her as long as his arms were strong to protect her and every beat of his heart was hers! Rose, perhaps some time you might care——"

"If you please, Miss Adare!" A voice wailed from the

region of the kitchen. "Do you remember how long that manicure teacher said I was to soak the cuticle knife? The enamel's all coming off the handle——"

"I'll be there, Sadie!" There was a new, sweet timbre in Rose Adare's voice and she turned to Paul and held out both hands. "'Someone for a fellow to bring his triumphs to,'" she repeated very softly. "You are coming to-night to tell me of your success in the Hartshorne case, aren't you? I shall be waiting."

At three that afternoon Chief Burke thundered at the door of Paul's apartments and precipitated himself forthwith upon his young confrêre with characteristic expostulation.

"Why didn't you let me know you would be back to-day?" he demanded. "Where've you been anyway, Paul, and what's the idea of leaving word for me to come here with a John Doe warrant, two plain-clothes men, and no more knowledge of what is going on than the newspapers themselves! They've been letting out a holler that will echo until the next Mayor gets in!"

"Well, you'll be able to silence that echo in an hour, Chief!" Paul smiled. "Where did you leave the boys?"

"Out in the hall, till you tell me the truth. Have you found him, Paul? Have you got the man who killed Mrs. Hartshorne?"

"You will have him yourself; he's coming here," responded Paul coolly. "It was the easiest way to walk him into a trap, but before he arrives a woman will be here who can tell you the whole story better than I could. She might have told us long ago if we hadn't both been blind! As a matter of fact, sir, you had the key of the whole affair in your hands before I ever appeared on the scene

of the investigation, at the moment you sent for me."

"How is that?" the Chief demanded suspiciously. "If you mean that little smear of blood on the inside of the cloak upstairs——"

"I mean when you told me over the 'phone that a murder had been committed and Matilde fainted."

"Matilde!"

Paul nodded.

"She took it coolly enough when she thought her mistress had killed herself, but went all to pieces at the word 'murder'. That was because she had a very clear idea as to who was guilty, providing such a crime had actually been committed, and the news was an overwhelming shock. I ran into Miss Adare, the secretary, the next day, after interviewing Mrs. Cowles, and she told me what Matilde had said to her as they stood together beside the body of Mrs. Hartshorne; that she would have guarded her with her own life from harm, but as long as Mrs. Hartshorne had killed herself, she—Matilde—saw no occasion for emotion. Do you see the significance of it, sir? She had no love for Mrs. Hartshorne; Sadie has told us how in loathing she burned the clothes her mistress gave her. She hated her more than anything on earth, yet she would have protected her from violence with her own life; not for the other woman's sake but to prevent her possible murderer from incurring the consequences of such an act, if she could."

"I'm beginning to see!" the Chief remarked. "She knew Mrs. Hartshorne's life was threatened, and stuck by her as the surest way of preventing a tragedy. But the fellow who had it in for her mistress—if it were a man, as you say—what was he to Matilde? Why should she shield him?"

"Because she loved him as much as she hated Mrs. Hartshorne." Paul threw open the door. "I think we had better

have the boys in now. She will be here at any moment and I want them out of sight when she comes."

The two plain-clothes men were summoned and stationed one behind the drawn curtains which shut off the bedroom and the other in an alcove near the door. Paul took a pistol from his pocket and placed it on the table near to his hand, concealed behind a little pile of magazines.

"But she hasn't even tried to communicate with a soul!" expostulated the Chief half-incredulously. "I've had her watched day and night!"

"A fact of which she was very well aware, as you told me yourself," Paul reminded him. "Matilde is no fool or she could not have trailed Mrs. Hartshorne, discovered her plans, gone to the Belmonde in advance of her and interested and cajoled her into offering the position as maid."

"Then it was all a frame-up? Matilde deliberately took the place——"

"Made it," Paul interrupted tersely. "Bribed the last maid to leave so that she might step into her shoes. And Matilde is no servant, Chief; her whole story is a tissue of lies. She was better born than her mistress and never even saw France."

"Well, what the—!" Chief Burke began explosively, but Paul held up a warning hand.

"Look out! She is coming."

He went to the door and flinging it open once more he called:

"Is that you, Matilde? It is dark on the stairs; can you see your way?"

"But yes, Monsieur." The quiet, self-contained tones replied to him. "I cannot comprehend what it is for which you desire my presence, but I have come. As you suggest, Monsieur, I am of course anxious to do what I can to aid

you in clearing up the mystery of Madame's death——"

She paused on reaching the door and noted the presence of the Chief. Her dark eyes flashed a cold glance of suspicion at Paul and then discreetly lowered their gaze.

"That is good," Paul commented gravely as he closed the door behind her. "Sit here, please. I am glad you have taken this attitude at last, Matilde, for now we shall get at results."

"But what more can I say?" Matilde gazed from one stern face to the other. "I have already told you my story——"

"And a very ingenious one it is," observed Paul. "Unfortunately for you, however, I have been able to disprove every statement you have made heretofore and now we are going to get at the truth. In the first place, Matilde, there is no yacht, the 'Belle Elise', registered in France, nor on any harbor records here of nine years ago; Monsieur and Madame Felix Courthier do not exist, nor did any of the other people with whom you claimed to have held positions. Your accent is not that of France and you were too eager to impress me with the supposition that the birth-records of Peronne—the town you adopted as yours in your story—had been destroyed in the war. Also you were quite sure that you had never been to New Orleans——"

He paused, for the woman who had sat unmoved beneath his indictment flinched at his last words and her sallow face slowly whitened as if the blood were being drained from it.

She raised stony eyes to his and spoke quietly:

"Well, Monsieur?"

"I have just come from there," he went on. "In the French quarter on St. Louis Street there are many people who know you well, *Marie* Benoit, and they remember your brother Jacques."

"It is not forbidden to adopt a given name which pleases one better than one's own, Monsieur, and where my home is does not concern the police." Her eyes did not waver. "I am not guilty of Madame's death."

"No. You would have prevented it if you could," Paul agreed. "You would have kept your brother's hands free from blood at all costs——"

"A-ah!" She sprang to her feet with an uncontrollable cry of anguish which she as quickly smothered beneath an outburst of rage. "You are mad, both of you! I will not listen! What has my brother to do with Madame Hartshorne? Because you are stupid, you cannot find the one who killed her, you would put the crime on the first person you think defenseless! My brother I have not seen in years; he may be dead himself! You must be desperate indeed, Messieurs, to have tried to drag him into the hideous affair. As for me, I have done nothing. You cannot hold me! I will go——"

"Not so fast, Marie. You ask me what your brother had to do with the woman known here as Mrs. Hartshorne; shall I tell you? Shall I recall the time when Jacques Benoit became Jack Bennett, vaudeville artist? When he met and married Annie Halsey and she ruined his career?" Paul eyed her steadily. "His old partner, Fred Sammis, can testify that the dead woman was your brother's wife, and no one in the world had greater cause to wish her dead than he."

The woman who had called herself Matilde wavered. Then her eyes fell and she made a gesture of surrender.

"It is true, Monsieur. You have learned too much; I shall not try to deceive you any longer and there is no reason why I should, for my brother is innocent and beyond reach of your accusation. He is dead!"

"Are you sure of that?" asked Paul. The Chief's face was a study.

"But yes, Monsieur!" she cried eagerly. "She, that creature, killed him as surely as she herself has been killed. She broke his heart, drove him to dissipation and despair, and finally to suicide! He drowned himself, Monsieur! I would not claim his body because of the disgrace, and he lies in a nameless grave in New Orleans. There were only us two left, Monsieur, my little brother and I, and I tried to be sister and mother both to him, but he was of the artistic temperament and impatient of restraint. He ran away from home and did many things well before he drifted upon the stage of the theater. He was always good, my Jacques; clean, and honest, and fearless, and with the high ambition until he met that woman of a wicked heart and she took from him all happiness! If you have learned so much, you know that after she had shamed him, dragged him in the dust, made of his ambition a dead thing, she flung him aside like an old glove and obtained her freedom once more. He drifted back to me, broken and in despair. I tried to make a man again of what she had left but it was useless, and so he died! As for her, Monsieur, what she did to my brother she may have done to another in the years that have passed and that other has taken his revenge. I do not know."

"Then why did you stoop to seek a menial position with your sister-in-law, Marie?" Paul queried. "Why did you serve the woman who had ruined your brother? What was your object in tracing her to Georgian Bay last summer, learning her plans from her maid and bribing that maid to leave that you might step into her place?"

"Perhaps I wished to see what she was like," Marie Benoit responded after a pause. "Perhaps I, too, desired

revenge in a different way than that of murder, Monsieur. As Madame Hartshorne she was raising herself high and there in the background was I, waiting until she reached the top to shame and drag her down as she had dragged my brother! But the opportunity was taken out of my hands and it may be that it is better so. I am content."

She shrugged as though a load was shifted from her shoulders, but her eyes could not meet his and Paul bent forward earnestly across the table.

"Your wit is nimble, Marie, but it will not suffice. Your brother is not dead! He is here in Eastopolis at this moment; I have seen and talked with him. Your desire was not revenge upon your sister-in-law but to prevent your brother from carrying out his acknowledged threat against her and incurring the penalty. You have failed!"

Her lips moved but no words came. Only her eyes, dark with dread, clung to his as if she would draw from them even at the last a refutation of his inexorable words. Then slowly her head dropped and she sank back senseless in her chair.

As Chief Burke rose and Paul sprang to her side, a faint, melodious sound came to their ears and they paused tensely and glanced at each other.

Someone was bounding lightly up the stairs, whistling a strain of infectious syncopation, a slow, dragging, sensuous air which lingered in echo as the thin, clear whistle ceased and a knock sounded upon the door.

"Come in." Paul's voice was steady but his hand had sought and closed about the pistol upon the table. .

The Chief, too, reached toward his pocket and the curtains at alcove and bed-room stirred as the door swung open and Max Vallory, the jazz band drummer, stepped nonchalantly across the threshold.

Chapter XXIV.

JACQUES BENOIT LAUGHS LAST.

THE woman in the chair stirred and her eye-lids fluttered open. Her gaze wandered in bewilderment for a moment and then fastened in a wild stare upon the stiffened figure in the doorway.

She noted his quick glance dart about the room and the nonchalant unconcern change to swift comprehension and reckless defiance; she saw, too, the noiseless figure which crept from the alcove and slipped behind the man at the door and her lips parted in a low moan of utter despair.

"Jacques! They know! They know!"

The man shrugged, glanced over his shoulder and came forward.

"I may sit down?" he asked with mocking courtesy. "This is a surprise, gentlemen, but not an unexpected one. I have wondered how long it would take you to discover the fairly obvious truth."

"You admit, then, that you shot your divorced wife, Annie Bennett, alias Mrs. Allison Hartshorne?" the Chief began in his most stern, official manner.

Vallory nodded indifferently with a hint of amusement in his hard eyes.

"You can cut the red tape," he advised coolly. "I put her out of the way at last, as I meant to from the beginning, and I didn't run away. If the chance for a clean shot hadn't come when she stood alone there in the con-

servatory, I would have dropped her in the ball-room in the presence of a hundred people. I wanted to get her and I did; that is all there is to it, but you can let Marie go. She had nothing to do with the affair, except to try to prevent it, and I'll answer for my own act. It is the best thing I ever did."

Marie's head fell into her hands and the slow tears crept between her fingers, but no one glanced at her. All eyes were fastened upon the dapper, defiant figure which sprawled apparently at ease in the chair before them.

"May I smoke?" he asked. "My cigarettes are in my upper vest pocket, if I may be allowed to reach for them without suspicion. I haven't got a gun on me, and if I had I wouldn't use it. I've no desire to cheat you out of the reward of your painstaking efforts.—Thank you."

He acknowledged Paul's curt nod and producing a silver case, selected a cigarette and lighted it. As the first puff of smoke curled to the ceiling he laughed in an odd exultant fashion and Marie, whose hands had fallen, gasped convulsively and was still.

"I suppose you want to know how I did it, don't you?" he drawled. "It was some stunt, wasn't it, to shoot a woman down before the eyes of a hundred people and get away with it! I was rather proud of the idea, myself. When you came to me a fortnight ago, Mr. Harvey, and I told you how I had conceived my version of the jazz band from watching the antics of a group of ragged negro musicians on the levee you weren't interested enough to inquire into the details of my performance. Had you been, I was quite prepared to tell you that among the various noise-producing instruments I had added to my collection was a small pistol from which I fired blank cartridges in a double-forte climax. I depended on the old slogan of the shell-

game operator: 'The hand is quicker than the eye'! It didn't fail me, you see."

"How did you know your opportunity would come?" Paul asked.

The other shrugged again.

"I didn't. Chance arranged that. I read in the papers that day that she would be present at the dance and I came prepared. Otherwise I should have got her somewhere if I had to break into her house to do it" he smiled. "Miss Ledyard proved an unexpected accomplice, when she found the body and had the conservatory door locked, but I haven't figured out yet how it was taken home where it was found the next day. However, that's not the point."

In spite of his easy tone the hand which held the cigarette began to tremble from the strain of the tension under which he held himself and regretfully he ground out the stub in the ash tray on the table before him.

Marie noted the motion and started forward in her chair, but still smiling he shook his head at her.

"I don't have to tell you my reason, I guess, for killing Annie. I was down and out for fair when I got hold of that jazz idea two years ago and pulled myself together. I had more ambition, then, than I'd ever had before, for I had made up my mind to find Annie and fix her, and I needed money for that. I knew I would run across her some day, I felt it like a promise. But I didn't wait for that. My line of work took me to the places she would naturally frequent and I never stopped looking for her; I picked up her trail more than once but I was just too late until now. She knew I was after her, for she had been warned and she must have taken alarm.

"Marie, too, knew what I intended and when she started out to prevent it I only had to have her watched, and with-

out knowing it she led me straight to the woman I was looking for. I had thought of Annie as working her sly, crooked games in some sporting crowd and I didn't expect to find her breaking into society here. When I learned of it I canceled the dates I had signed up for my orchestra, and arranged a new route that would land us in Eastopolis."

He paused as an uncontrollable, nervous shudder swept him and a drop of perspiration started upon his brow.

"It was then that I added the blank cartridge pistol to my drums and rattles and the rest of the outfit; I wanted to get my men accustomed to the sound of the shot so that they wouldn't tumble to it when my big chance came. You know what a hit we made when we got here, and how the swell society crowd fell for the jazz stuff and mobbed us for engagements after we had played those two weeks in the Grosvenor grill. I took the blanks out of my pistol and reloaded it with the real thing and every night I looked for her there but she didn't show up. We played four big, private dates later on but I never caught a glimpse of her and I was beginning to think that I would have to go out after her, when along came the Red Cross affair and the announcement that she would attend it. That was the best news I'd had in five years!"

His voice had grown husky and now it ceased and he passed a hand across his dampened brow in bewildered fashion.

"I guess there isn't any more to tell. With your—keen perceptions—you can fill in the gaps.—How dark it's growing!"

The Chief glanced in amazement at the sunlight streaming in the window and then at Paul who had taken a sudden step forward, his face swiftly tensed.

But Marie was before him. Springing from her chair

she rushed to the man who had sunk with closed eyes, and cradling his head in her arms, turned fiercely on the others.

"Leave him to me!" she cried. "You fools! Don't you see it is the end? My little Jacques, they cannot hurt you now! It was the right way, the only way, but Mon Dieu! that I had to sit by and see you do it, saying no word!"

"He's done for himself!" the Chief exclaimed. "But how——?"

"The cigarette case!" Paul extracted it from the pocket of the limp form and opened it. Among the cigarettes there lay several small, grayish-white tablets. "When he took a smoke he slipped one of these between his lips!"

"Put it over on us at the last, by Gad!" Chief Burke seated himself heavily in his chair once more. "Any use calling for a doctor, Paul?"

The latter shook his head and even as he stepped back the erstwhile Vallory moved, gently pushing aside his sister's arms and with a supreme effort his heavy lids lifted.

"Sorry—not to have played fair." His voice was a mere rasping, toneless whisper. "But a Benoit musn't die—in the Chair. You forgot I—I had been an actor and—it was almost—too—easy!"

Through the slow, dragging minutes they watched him as if fascinated and once more he rallied.

"Be sure you tell Frog—I came back." The breath was rattling in his throat. "He believed in me as I—believed in her.—It's so cold!—Marie——"

His head fell forward upon his breast and with a sob the woman gathered it close to her again.

"He's gone." Chief Burke cleared his throat and motioned the two officers outside.

Save for the woman's subdued grief the room was very still.

"You've won, Paul. You've solved the case."

Paul shook his head.

"It was Rose Adare, really," he responded. "Her quick mind set me on the right track. That, and the lucky find of the second bullet."

(The End.)